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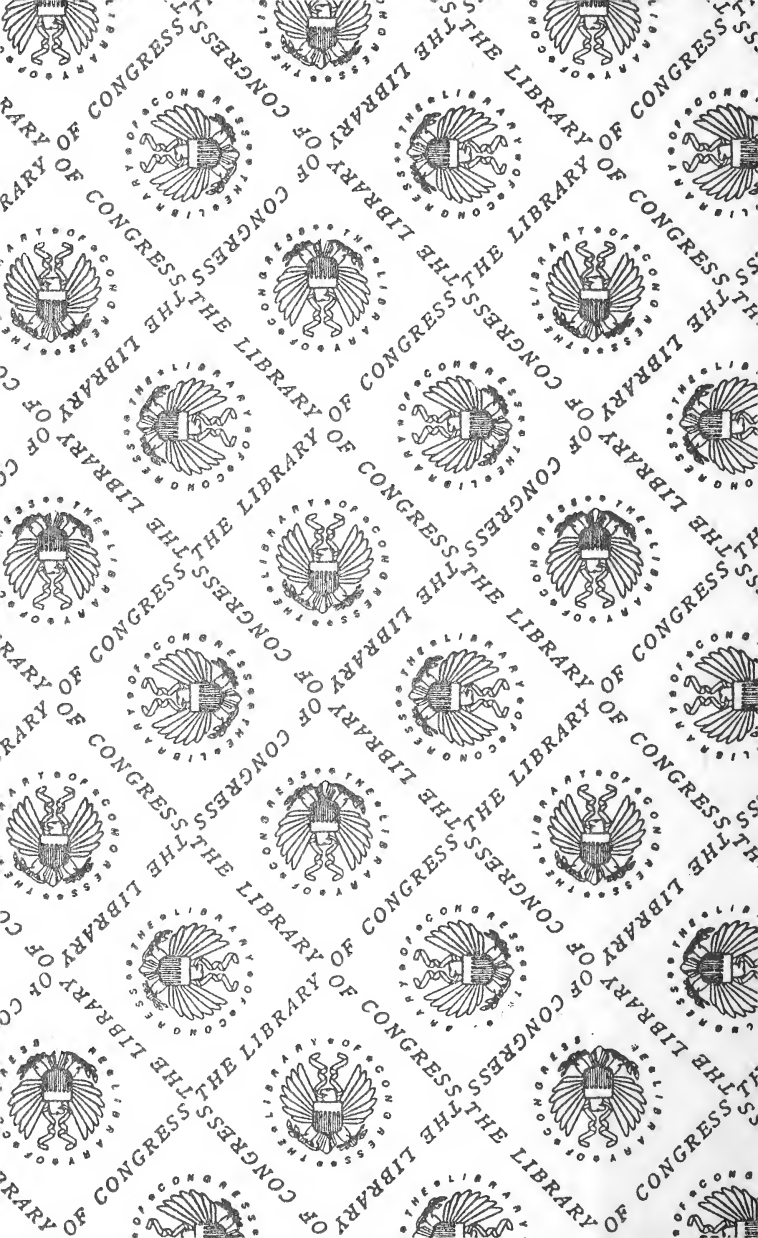
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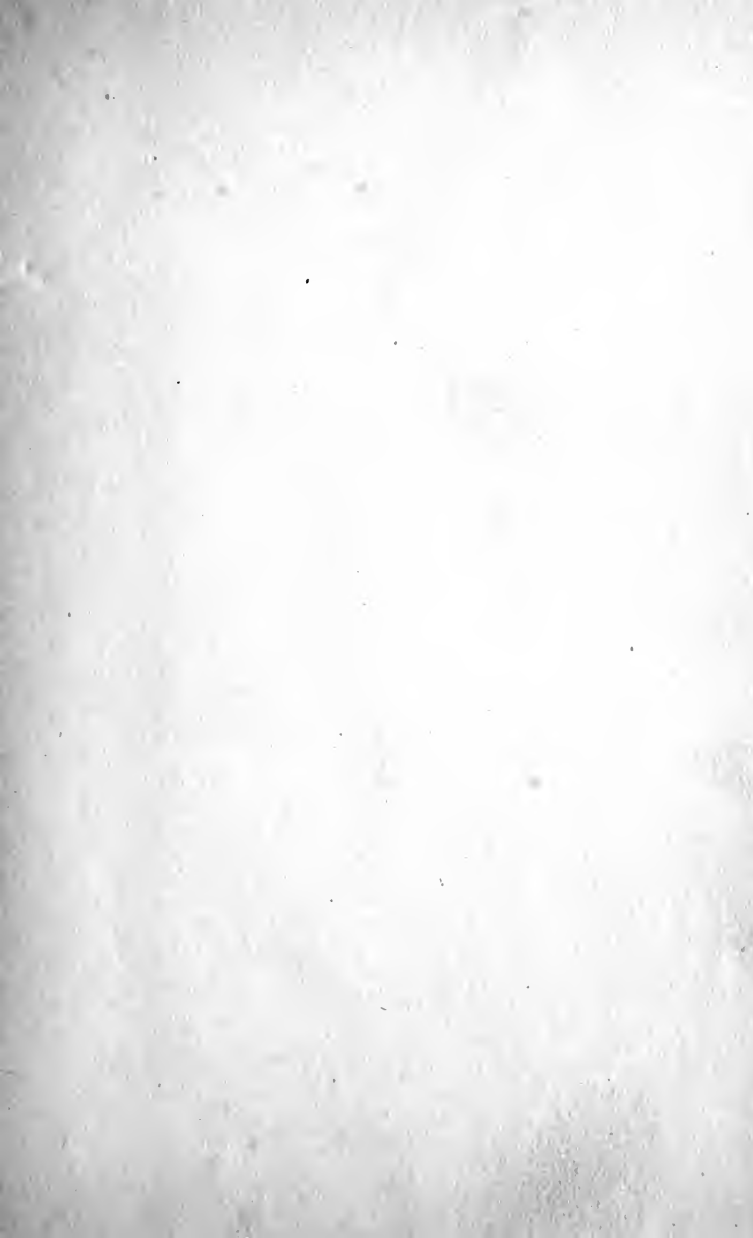


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THE PRICE



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A Play in Three Acts

Paul K. Briden



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THE PRICE.

IN THREE ACTS.

TIME—*Present.* PLACE—*A Certain City.*

CHARACTERS.

DR. CLOTHIER.

PETER MACLAIN, *his assistant, and medical adviser to the Alms House.*

THE DEAN.

MR. GARVIN, *assistant district attorney.*

SAM WEBER.

POLEMAN.

HELEN CLOTHIER.

HEDRIA MEYERS.

WHISKEY SALLIE.

MAID.

PATIENTS.

MAN WITH A COUGH.

OLD GENTLEMAN.

IRRITABLE GENTLEMAN.

LADY IN BLACK.

LADY IN MAUVE.

LADY WITH DOG.

SCENES.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Waiting-room in Dr. Clothier's office, ten A. M.*

SCENE II.—*Same. Three hours later.*

[*Between Scenes I and II the curtain should be lowered, to denote the passing of time.*]

ACT II.

Peter's room. Eleven o'clock, the same evening.

ACT III.

*Same. Seven o'clock, the next morning.
The whole action of the play occurs within
twenty-four hours.*

ACT I

SCENE I

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Doctor Clothier's waiting-room.*

Typical waiting-room of a prosperous fashionable doctor. Door to left, leading out into main hall. Door back, leading into office. On right, marble mantel, with heavily framed engravings of eminent physicians of the past. Left of mantel, desk with pill and medicine cabinet of carved mahogany over it. Heavy prints of surgical operations, eminent medical scientists, etc., hang on walls. Chairs line the sides of the room. Large table, center, brass inkwell, pad, etc., vase of expensive flowers, piles of current magazines. As curtain rises the room is filled with patients, distinguished as middle-aged lady dressed in mauve; old gentleman with gold cane; fussy middle-aged man with weak throat; tall, severe lady, carrying silk bag and

lap dog, much to the annoyance of irritable gray-haired gentleman, whose whole attitude is one of severe disapproval of its presence. They are all reading magazines and papers, and their general appearance and positions indicate expectation and impatience. The young man with the weak throat coughs; they all look up, and then resume reading. The old gentleman seizes the opportunity to rise stiffly and go to the table, exchanges his magazine. Hurries back quickly to his chair near door, as very stout, healthy looking, elaborately dressed lady in black rustles in. She looks about for a seat. Seeing lady in mauve sitting on sofa beside fussy, irritable gentleman, down right, crossing over to her, gushingly.

LADY IN BLACK. How are you, my dear? [Sits down beside her on three inches of sofa and the rest on man. There is a violent but effectual upheaval.]

LADY IN MAUVE. [*Moving over one or two inches; with great effusion.*] Some days I think myself really better, and then ——

LADY IN BLACK. [*Moving nearer; interrupting; rapidly.*] My case, exactly. I have to be so careful with my diet ——

[*Fussy, middle-aged gentleman, emerging from total eclipse, speechless from rage and lack of breath. Tries vainly during the rest of the scene to extricate himself entirely.*]

LADY IN MAUVE. My back —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN BLACK. Nothing—absolutely nothing. A few —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN MAUVE. The doctor's afraid —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN BLACK. All germinous foods—you can't believe —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN MAUVE. [*In a penetrating whisper.*] An operation —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN BLACK. I lacked nutrition, but now —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN MAUVE.—Of course, the doctor says nothing —— [*Talks.*]

LADY IN BLACK. Fifty-five separate kinds of germs.

[*The back office doors opens. Everybody turns, facing it.*]

PETER. [*Coming out of back office, a tall, heavily built man of about thirty-five or forty; brown hair and close-cropped beard; rugged features; a mouth that sets in a straight, determined line; gray, humorous, kindly eyes, that can harden like flint. He is dressed in a well-tailored but quiet suit of business clothes. Looking at them, quietly.*] I am sorry, but the doctor has just 'phoned that he missed his train. [*Looking around.*] Is there anything I can do?

[*Everybody, rising, begins to button up and go out.*]

LADY IN BLACK. [*To Lady in Mauve.*]
What on earth will I eat?

LADY IN MAUVE. Why [*with a look at Peter, who is watching with just a twinkle in his eye*]
don't you ask him?

LADY IN BLACK. [*Indignantly.*] Ask him?
I did, once, and he said, "Beef."

[*They go out, talking together.*]

IRRITABLE GENTLEMAN. Well! [*Rising.*]
After waiting an hour—an hour— [*to Peter*]
you tell him I have waited an hour.

PETER. I am very sorry. If there is anything I can do ——

IRRITABLE GENTLEMAN. [*Snorting.*] You?
Thank you—no. [*Goes out.*]

SEVERE OLD GENTLEMAN. Office hours are office hours.

PETER. He will be here at one-thirty.

SEVERE OLD GENTLEMAN. Hum! [*Goes out.*]

LADY WITH DOG. [*Speaking to dog.*] You poor, dear darling. [*Exit.*]

HELEN. [*A slender, dainty girl of about twenty-four, dressed in a simple walking suit. Coming in, followed by the Dean; after standing aside, as they go out, to Peter.*] What's the row? [*Looking around.*] Where's dad?

PETER. Missed his train, and I offered to officiate.

HELEN. [*Laughing.*] Oh!

THE DEAN. [*A little, dried-up, ruddy-faced clergyman, with a pair of twinkling eyes; shaking his head.*] Dear, dear, Maclain.

HELEN. [*Beginning to unfasten her hat.*] Never mind, Peter.

[*Enter Maid, followed by Hedria.*]

MAID. [*Dressed in very neat black, and proper white trimmings; turning to Hedria; curtly.*] You can wait here, now. [*Goes out.*]

[*Hedria looks around vaguely.*]

PETER. [*Puzzled; looking at her; crossing over to her.*] What can I do for you?

HEDRIA. [*An emaciated, worn figure of what might be a girl in years, but a woman in experience. The face, heavily lined with wrinkles, has shrunken cheeks and prominent cheek-bones under long, wispy, lifeless strands of hair. The eyes are the only unusual feature; deep, sunken and unnaturally bright, yet with a look of bewildered, hopeless suffering that smolders and flames into passionate hate. She is dressed in an old, worn, spotted, black satin skirt, a faded red jacket, with her hat over one ear. Speaking in a hoarse, rasping whisper.*] I am here by appointment. [*Crosses over, and sits down in left-hand corner. She begins to cough in a horrible, racking way.*

HELEN. [*Turning; pityingly.*] Oh!

PETER. [*Pouring something into a glass; crossing over to her; kindly.*] You'd better take this.

HEDRIA. [*Shaking her head.*] No [*pressing her hand against her side*]. It don't do no good [*wearily*]. Nothin' does no good.

PETER. [*Not unkindly.*] I am afraid the doctor won't be here for a while.

HEDRIA. [*As if repeating a lesson.*] I am here by appointment.

HELEN. [*To Peter, as he comes back and puts the glass down, dropping her voice.*] Can't you do something? Can't it be cured?

PETER. [*Shaking his head.*] Consumption—the last stage.

THE DEAN. [*Who has been watching Hedria intently; aside, to Peter.*] It isn't all consumption.

[*Peter, meeting his look, nods.*]

HELEN. It would kill me to be a doctor—to see nothing but pain and suffering. I couldn't stand it. And yet, doctors are always cheerful. [*Looking at Peter, her eyes*

dancing.] I don't believe they have any hearts.

PETER. No; I lost mine.

HELEN. [*Looking at him, and picking up her hat, laughing.*] Oh! [*Patting his arm.*] Goose! [*Goes out.*

THE DEAN. [*Looking after her.*] What a little woman she is! You're a lucky man, Maclain, a lucky —— [*As Hedria coughs again; shuddering.*] How horrible!

PETER. I am getting used to it. One sees so much of it at B——.

THE DEAN. B——? The Alms House? [*Turning quickly.*] And how do they get there? Who sends them there?

PETER. I have often thought of that.

THE DEAN. [*Working himself up; unconsciously raising his voice.*] Thought of it. Oh, yes. But never asked, hey? They must have a certificate. Who gives it to them? You

don't know. Nobody knows. Why? Because—nobody wants to know. It's pleasanter—it's easier—to hold the door open and look the other way.

PETER. [*Wheeling around.*] Well, I be damned! [*Looking at the Dean, with a short laugh.*] Do you know what you say?

THE DEAN. [*Earnestly.*] Yes, I know. [*Coming a step nearer.*] I know what I say, but you [*his voice trembling a little*]; you don't, Peter. If I could—if I could only make you see —— [*Breaks off as Hedria begins to cough in a low, horrible, strangling way; turns; looking at her.*]

HEDRIA. [*Clasping her side.*] Water.

[*The Dean hurries over to small table—left—with silver pitcher and water glasses on it, fills one and crosses to her. She takes it greedily.*]

[*Handing it back; looking at him.*] You're a fool.

THE DEAN. [*Startled.*] My child!

HEDRIA. I ain't your child. [*Looking at him, maliciously.*] Least, I don't guess so.

THE DEAN. [*Drawing back.*] Oh!

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Entering, followed by a maid carrying large doctor's instrument case. He is a heavily built, middle-aged man; well, but quietly, dressed, with a manner of personal interest and kindly sympathy that is tremendously attractive, especially to women. Looking around.*] Why, what's the matter? Where's everybody?

[*The maid crosses—left—and hands Peter the bag.*]

PETER. I am very sorry, but they wouldn't stay.

[*Maid crosses over, takes water pitcher and glasses, and, with an expressive side glance at Hedria, goes out.*]

[*Placing case on chair by cabinet.*] I did my best—I offered my services. [*Smiling.*] You better get another assistant.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Shaking his head.*] You'll do, Peter; you'll do. Only a little more sympathy, and you'll do. Sympathy's what they need. Sympathy's what they pay for. No matter whether they're sick or not. The ones that aren't, need the most sympathy; they're harder to cure. [*Seeing the Dean.*] Ah, how are you, Dean?

THE DEAN. [*Shaking hands, cordially.*] I just ran in with Helen. We are going down to the ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Laughing.*] Ah, these charities—always charities. [*Frowning.*] And yet, heaven knows, we seem to need them. [*As Hedria coughs; starting.*] Ah!

PETER. She says she has an appointment.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Frowning.*] An —— [*Giv-*

ing her a quick look.] Oh, yes. [Crossing up stage; to Hedria; opening office door.] Step this way.

[To Peter.] It won't take a minute. [Goes out, followed by Hedria.]

THE DEAN. Strange. A woman like that here.

PETER. *[Crossing over to left; opening the doctor's case; looking over contents.]* Nothing is strange for a doctor. *[Opening cabinet, taking out instruments from case, laying them on tray on ledge.]* Doctors see things, and hear things, that you only think about. *[Begins to refill the empty vials.]*

THE DEAN. *[Looking at him; lips twitching.]* And—preach about. *[As Peter, his eyebrows slightly raised, steals a look at him sitting down in chair to right of table; earnestly.]* But I'm not preaching.

[Peter turns back to cabinet.]

You mayn't hold the door open ——

PETER. [*Holding up bottle; examining contents; sweetly.*] I am glad you grant that much.

THE DEAN. Yes, I grant *that*; but [*leaning forward*] you DON'T SHUT IT.

PETER. [*Turning; staring at him.*] Shut it! Do you think I could shut "the door" [*beginning to fill a vial*], as you call it?

THE DEAN. [*Slowly.*] May be not, but you could make it *not* worth getting in. You could fight.

PETER. [*Slipping vial into case.*] And get fired [*looking up, snapping his fingers*], like that. And *that* isn't the only consideration. There's another—COMMON HUMANITY. You've got to take the women in. They can't die out in the gutter. Why, if you saw *that*, you [*turning back, beginning to get bandages, etc.*]*—why*, you would be the first to shout BRUTE.

THE DEAN. But I won't see it. [*As Peter, turning, looks at him; leaning forward.*] The gutters are to be open to the public, it would make THE people think.

[*Peter, leaning against ledge, looks away; frowning.*

[*In a low, tense voice.*] And if once they thought [*clutching his hands*]*—really thought [his eyes shining]**—why, there would be an end [slowly, as Peter turns as if to speak], not to all of it, but to much of it. It wouldn't be so easy, so smooth, so convenient. There wouldn't be so much room for the new—because they couldn't get rid of the old. Girls wouldn't be sucked down as they're sucked down now. It wouldn't be a drain—that flows out as it flows in—but a cesspool, that could only run over. [Rising, as Peter, getting down from the ledge, begins to put bandages, etc., into case; all earnestness.]* I may be an “old fool,” but I'd

give all the years of my life for your chance.

[*Peter, looking up, squares his shoulders.*

TO DO—NOT TO PREACH. To fight for those souls that have nobody to fight for them. [*As Hedria coughs, turning, looking in the direction; in a low, unsteady voice.*] Even if there was only one soul, one to have saved [*his eyes going back to door*] from that.

HELEN. [*Appearing at doorway; dressed in elaborate street dress, large muff tucked under her arm, gloves in hand. Looking from one to the other, her eyes twinkling.*] Sounds like a sermon. [*Coming down.*] Since Peter won't come to the sermon [*handing the Dean her muff to hold*], bring the sermon to Peter. That's an excellent idea. [*To Peter, beginning to draw on her gloves.*] I hope you are converted?

PETER. [*Smiling a little.*] I'm not sure [*stealing a look at the Dean*], not quite sure, but I think —— [*Breaks off wincing as Hedria coughs again.*

HELEN. [*Starting.*] Oh! [*Looking around.*]
Where is the girl?

PETER. [*Snapping case shut.*] In with
your father.

HELEN. [*Eagerly.*] Has Dad come back?
I do hope he can do something for her. [*With
conviction.*] If any one can, Dad can. [*To
Peter.*] Give him my love.

PETER. [*Shaking his head.*] Never.

HELEN. [*Laughing.*] Oh, don't be silly.

PETER. [*Kissing her.*] I can't help it.

HELEN. [*Slipping away.*] Oh, we'll shock
the Dean. [*Patting his arm; going to door;
laughing.*] Well, give him my daughterly af-
fection. [*Goes out, followed by the Dean.*]

THE DEAN. [*Turning at doorway; looking
across at Peter, wistfully.*] I've done all I
could—I've preached.

PETER. [*Smiling slightly.*] A jolly uncom-
fortable sermon [*slowly*] that sticks.

HELEN. [*Reappearing at doorway; beckons; laughing.*] Come—come on. [*As the Dean hurries toward her; taking her muff.*] You know what they'll [*gently pushing him out before*] say. [*About to close the door; poking her head in.*] Peter, the 'phone's ringing. [*Exit, followed by Peter. There is a slight pause.*]

PETER. [*Coming in, and crossing over to office door; rapping.*] Doctor!

[*Dr. Clothier's voice.*] Yes.

PETER. Dr. Simons wants you over the 'phone a minute. There is some new symptom in the Bertolet case.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Opening door.*] All right. [*Starting across room; pausing.*] Oh! Peter, I wish you'd do something for me. Make out a certificate.

PETER. [*Starting.*] A certificate?

DR. CLOTHIER. Yes — a poor house cer-

tificate [*nodding toward Hedria, who has come to the door*], for her. [*Goes out.*]

PETER. [*Turning, and going over to desk; opening drawer, and picking up a heavy, official-looking order-book; evidently thinking deeply. Looks up and sees Hedria. Then, with an air of decision, recrosses to table, pulls up chair and sits; opening book.*] Sit down, please. [*Hedria drops wearily into a chair against the wall, staring at the floor.*]

PETER. [*Inking his pen; evidently reading from a form; beginning to write.*] Name—Hedria Meyers?

HEDRIA. [*Indifferently.*] I guess so.

PETER. [*Looking up.*] You guess so?

HEDRIA. Yes.

PETER. [*Slowly.*] Don't you know?

HEDRIA. [*Indifferently.*] They mostly call me that.

PETER. [*Writes it down; reading.*] Father's name?

HEDRIA. [*In the same tone.*] I don't know.

PETER. [*Looking up.*] Hey?

HEDRIA. No.

PETER. [*Reading.*] Mother's name.

HEDRIA. I don't know.

PETER. Don't know who your mother was?

HEDRIA. No.

PETER. [*Reading.*] An orphan, then?

HEDRIA. I don't know.

PETER. You don't?

HEDRIA. No.

PETER. [*Reading.*] In what county were you born?

HEDRIA. I don't know.

PETER. [*Putting down pen; sharply.*] Then, if you don't know in what part of the State you were born, and who your mother or father were, how do you expect to get into the Alms House?

HEDRIA. [*Looking up.*] Say; drop it.

What's the use of lying. It's all fixed.

PETER. What's fixed?

HEDRIA. Me gettin' in. We always get in. I'm one of Sam's girls. [*Coughing and choking.*] You can't say I ain't fit.

PETER. [*Slamming book; quietly.*] No; you're not fit.

HEDRIA. [*Staring at him dumbly.*] Ain't yer goin' to give it to me?

PETER. [*Sharply.*] No.

HEDRIA. [*Getting up, and coming down; breathing rapidly.*] But I'm Sam's girl.

PETER. [*Rising.*] I do not care whose girl you are. [*As Dr. Clothier comes in.*] Doctor, I can't make out that certificate.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Starting.*] Hey? [*Crossing over to Peter; sharply.*] Why not?

PETER. [*Meeting his look.*] Because she didn't answer a single question required by the certificate.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Savagely.*] Nonsense. The girl's crazy. [*Facing Hedria; sharply.*] Didn't you tell me your father's name was Frank Meyers?

HEDRIA. [*Looking up, startled; then looking down, wearily.*] Yes.

DR. CLOTHIER. And your mother's—Matilda Meyers, *née* Efflefinger?

HEDRIA. Yes.

DR. CLOTHIER. And you were born in York, Pennsylvania?

HEDRIA. Yes.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*To Peter; sarcastically.*] Anything else?

PETER. [*Who has been writing in his notebook; gravely.*] That's all; thank you. [*To Hedria.*] As soon as I have this confirmed by my agents, I'll send you the certificate. What's your address?

HEDRIA. [*Startled.*] My address?

PETER. Or else you can come for it at the end of the week.

HEDRIA. The end of the —— Why, ain't I goin' there now?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Breaking in.*] There's enough of this red tape; give the girl her certificate.

PETER. [*Still; without looking up; quietly.*] When I have made the necessary inquiries. Yes.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Choking*]. I told you it was all right. Do you mean to doubt my word?

PETER. I mean to doubt—nothing.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Controlling himself with an effort; facing him.*] Maclain, who got you your appointment?

PETER. [*Meeting his look; passionately.*] You, and I mean to prove myself worthy of the trust. [*Quietly.*] If that girl tells the truth, she gets in; if not ——

HEDRIA. [*Springing to her feet; wildly.*] But I've got to get in. [*Clinging to the chair; swaying to and fro.*] I'm one of —— [*Breaks off, as the doctor puts his hand heavily on her shoulder; after one quick, frightened look drops down into chair, exhausted.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Facing Peter; in a low, dry voice.*] You mean to examine all applications [*moistening his lips*] like this?

PETER. I do. [*Looking at him very intently.*] And, if it is not in accordance with the regulations, to refuse it.

DR. CLOTHIER. Even if it is personally endorsed by myself, as a director?

PETER. [*His face whitening and setting.*] Yes.

DR. CLOTHIER. You do?

PETER. [*Doggedly.*] Yes.

DR. CLOTHIER. The inevitable scandal which will be brought upon me [*his voice trembling*]—

and mine [*Peter winces*—will be no deterrent?

PETER. [*Breaking out.*] I [*controlling himself with an effort; in the same quiet, impersonal voice*—I hope you will not force me to such a step.

DR. CLOTHIER. But if I do? [*Wetting his lips; with a quick look toward Hedria; moving away from her toward Peter; dropping his voice.*] If I must?

PETER. [*Starting*] Must. [*Incredulously.*] You! [*Slowly; looking at him.*] If any one [*his hand clinching*—any one had told me, that you—Helen's father ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Meeting his look; coming one step nearer; quietly.*] I'm tied—hand and foot—absolutely.

PETER. [*Below his breath.*] God!

DR. CLOTHIER. If you refuse to do what—I ask [*his voice trembling*—what I—must ask. If you force an issue ——

PETER. [*Turning away.*] I'm not forcing an issue. I simply refuse to sign the girl's certificate [*raising his head*]*—as I will refuse to sign others.*

DR. CLOTHIER. [*In the same, dead voice.*] And if you do, they will crush you—and I—I can do nothing [*emphasizing it*]*—nothing.* [*His voice trembling.*] In Helen's name, I ask you *not* to refuse.

PETER. [*Wheeling around.*] In Helen's name! [*As Dr. Clothier nods; coming down; white with passion.*] In Helen's name, *you* ask me to do—now—deliberately, what I did before unthinking? You ask me to help facilitate their [*checking himself*]*—their [bitterly] business?* To do away with the refuse that otherwise would block and impede? To be their gutter-sweeper — their scavenger? [*Gaining control of himself; with a savage little laugh.*] Thank you; I won't. I—I refuse.

DR. CLOTHIER. You refuse?

PETER. Yes.

HEDRIA. [*Rising; wavering as she stands; in a low, hoarse voice.*] You [*coughing and choking*—you ain't a-going to give it—to me?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Sharply.*] Be still.

[*Hedria, with a quick, frightened look, moves off—left.*

[*Peter's eyes follow her; his face setting and hardening.*

[*To Peter; drawing out center chair; sitting heavily.*] If you refuse, I must cut myself free from you. [*As Peter turning, looks at him; avoiding his eyes.*] If I don't, my name will be dragged down into the gutter; and my daughter's will go with it.

[*Peter starts; about to speak; checks himself.*

[*Moistening his lips.*] You see, I have no choice. [*Slowly; leaning across the table; hold-*

ing out his hands.] I have made my last appeal.

[There is a slight pause.

[Hedria, breaking into a low, choking cough, leans up against the wall.

PETER. *[His eyes on Hedria; slowly.]* I—I can't.

[There is a sound of woman's quick steps, a swish of silk skirts, and Helen appears hurriedly in the doorway.

HELEN. *[Eagerly.]* Oh, Daddy! *[Pausing; looking from one to the other; her eyes twinkling.]* Why, you look like a funeral. Discussing some nice, cheerful disease; I suppose. *[Coming down.]* Well, I won't interrupt you long. I only want ten dollars, Daddy. One's no good at a bazaar without ten dollars. *[Slips her hand affectionately into Dr. Clothier's pocket.*

DR. CLOTHIER. *[Taking her hand.]* Helen, you know me?

HELEN. [*Staring at him.*] Know you?
[*Laughing.*] I should think I do.

DR. CLOTHIER. You know I have never asked anything unreasonable of you?

HELEN. [*Shaking her head; her eyes dancing.*] Never.

DR. CLOTHIER. Then, if I ask you to give up this man?

HELEN. Man? [*Staring at him.*] Peter?
[*As his hand closes on hers; with a frightened little laugh.*] You're joking. [*Giving him a little shake.*] Only I wish you wouldn't look so horribly solemn—it's not fair.

DR. CLOTHIER. I'm not joking—I mean it.

HELEN. [*Her eyes widening; incredulously.*]
To give up—Peter? [*As he makes a gesture of assent; with a broken, little laugh.*] But—I love him.

DR. CLOTHIER. And I ask you to put that love away—to put him out of your heart—out of your thoughts.

HELEN. [*In a whisper.*] To—to ———
[*Breaking out.*] But I don't understand; just a little while ago—not more than five minutes ago—you were such good friends, and now—now ——— [*Her voice breaks.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. Because you trust me [*his voice trembling*] without asking the reason.

HELEN. Oh, but Daddy! It's all a mistake; some terrible mistake; something that can be explained. [*Turning; impatiently.*] Why don't you say something, Peter? Why do you stand there as if—as if you were frozen out of ice? [*Her voice trembling; all-pleading.*] I love you, Peter; why *don't* you explain?

PETER. [*Turning; taking a step forward; passionately.*] Explain?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Throwing back his head; with a look of a man with his back to the wall.*] Yes—the truth. What *you* must know to be *the truth*. You, who say you love her; why

don't you tell it to her [*his voice breaking; unsteadily; his head falling between his clasped hands*]*—to—to my daughter?*

[There is a moment's silence.

[Peter, his face softening, starts to speak.

Hedria begins to cough in a low, strangling way. Giving her a quick look; his face whitening and setting; turns and crosses toward door.

HELEN. [*Looking after him; with a half-suppressed cry.*] Pe—— [*Dr. Clothier, his hand raised, his face white, haggard; his hand closing on hers, checks her; in a whisper; her voice trailing away.*] ter.

[As he goes out, Hedria, facing Helen for a moment with one quick, mocking, contemptuous look, slips out after him.

CURTAIN.

ACT I
SCENE II



ACT I.

SCENE II.—*Same as Scene I. Time, three hours later.*

As the curtain rises, the maid is discovered covering furniture with rubber covers. At the table sits Sam Weber, lounging back, his hands in his pockets, his hat a little to the side of his head. A thin, insignificant-looking, little man in a cheap, worn suit of store blue, any age between forty-five and fifty-five. A man you might take for a mechanic, until you looked at his eyes, that have a trick of narrowing into pin-heads; his lips, thin, when not smiling oilily, draws back, curling away from yellow, fang-ish-looking teeth. Poleman is slowly walking around room, examining pictures, certificates, etc., with growing awe. A heavily built man, with blank, brutish-looking face; dressed in

flashy suit, with vast expanse of dirty, white waistcoat, and heavy gold chain. A large "diamond" sparkles in his bedraggled, but brilliant, tie. His hat, one size too small, is stuck on the back of his head. The maid, having put on the last cover, crosses over to right, picks up heavy gold umbrella that is leaning against wall, dripping a stream of water, and with a look of thinly veiled contempt, toward Poleman, turns toward hall door.

POLEMAN. [*Seeing umbrella; starting forward.*] Here! [*As she turns.*] I don't want to lose that.

MAID. [*Looking at him.*] Things are not lost here, sir. [*Goes out.*]

POLEMAN. [*Turning to Sam; pushing back his hat.*] Gee, if I see how yer done it.

SAM. Done what?

POLEMAN. Why, get him where you wanted. [*Looking around.*] He don't need the money.

SAM. [*Lounging back; drawling.*] No, I guess he don't. There ain't many on this here street that needs the money—now.

POLEMAN. Then I don't see how ——
[*Breaks off as the maid re-enters with silver pitcher; tinkling ice water; on tray with glasses; puts it down on small table and goes out.*

SAM. [*Looking at him; pityingly.*] No; maybe yer don't—maybe yer don't. It's just keeping your eyes open. That's what I do. I keep my eyes open. I never took no time a-looking up and down this here street a-hunting the prettiest name on the shiniest plate. Yer bet your life I didn't. It's the little fellows—the new ones—who've hung out their shingles and are a-waitin'. [*With a chuckle; his lips curling back.*] Waiting; while the agent's talking rent, and every day they're a cinching a new hole in their belts. Well, when there ain't no

more holes to cinch, you'll find they're thinking differently about money—and [*his eyes narrowing*]*—other things. [Rubbing his hands.]* You'll find a good many.

POLEMAN. But—*him?*

SAM. [*Tilting back; easily.*] I guess he was young once, wasn't he? [*Thrusting his hands into his pockets.*] I guess we were all young, *once.*

POLEMAN. [*Starting.*] Hey! [*Crossing over; in a whisper.*] Yer don't mean—to say?

SAM. [*Looking at him; his eyes narrowing.*] Nothing—When I say shut—I mean—*shut.*

POLEMAN.—[*Hurriedly.*] All right—all right, only [*looking around, drawing in his breath*]*—gee!*

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Coming in—haggard, worn—in a low tone, shutting the door carefully behind him.*] Well, gentlemen!

SAM. [*Nodding.*] Howdy, Doc. [*Takes off hat and carefully places it under chair.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. I am sorry—keeping you waiting. [*Crosses over, and opens office door, looking in.*]

POLEMAN. [*Nodding.*] That's all right, Doc.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Carefully shutting door; crossing over, pulls chair to center of table, sits facing audience—to Sam.*] I am sorry for this lamentable occurrence.

SAM. Oh, that's all right, Doc. The colts generally do some kicking.

POLEMAN. [*Pulling up chair near table—to the left—sitting heavily.*] Yes—but we seem to have run into regular bronco this time.

SAM. [*Nodding.*] That's right; that is, and we've got to step lively. When it comes to mud throwing it's the first shot that counts.

DR. CLOTHIER. But I don't like ——

SAM. Neither do I. I'm for peace, but when it comes to fightin', why, I ain't no quitter—I ain't.

POLEMAN. [*Enthusiastically.*] That's right—that is. [*Jerks hat forward.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. But—is not there—another way?

SAM. No—there ain't. He's got a story, and it ain't a particularly pretty one neither, and the first thing you knows, up he trots to the authorities, and the next thing you hear the kids yelling, "Extra—Scandal in the Poor House; Eminent Physician Implicated."

[*Dr. Clothier winces.*]

Say, how many do you think would be in this here office next morning?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Getting up and pacing up and down.*] I don't know—I don't know. [*Turning; facing.*] But what can we do? I tell you he is straight—straight as a die.

SAM. That's all right. I'll fix that. You can tell them a fellow's straight till yer black in the face and they'll look like yer lying [*dropping his voice*], but yer give them the wink. [*Chuckles.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. I wish to God I had never done it.

SAM. Why not? It was just an act of charity—it was. What was to become of those poor girls? And in return what'd yer get? A free dispensary for the poor and a "home for cancer" from the city. [*With pride.*] Sam Weber ain't no rich man, but he's appreciative, he is, and he knows the ropes. So the poor get a fine dispensary and a cancer hospital that's the envy of everybody, and the poor girls got a nice place to go to. There ain't nothing to be ashamed of in that, is there?

POLEMAN. [*Vigorously.*] No.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Wiping his forehead.*] No

doubt you are right, but isn't there some other way of stopping him? Don't you think if you did not send any more ——

SAM. Then what am I going to do? What is all of us going to do? [*Emphatically.*] No, Doc. I've stood by you. Yer the biggest "Philanthropic," Doc, in this here city. Yer been write up in the papers and yer picture's in the magazines. Yer *it*, and [*looking at him; his eyes narrowing*] yer want TO STAY—*it*.

DR. CLOTHIER. But Sam —— [*Breaking off with a quick, apprehensive glance toward Poleman, who is listening—all ears.*] Mr. Weber ——

SAM. [*Turning abruptly — to Poleman.*] You'd better go hunt your "umbrel."

POLEMAN. [*Easily.*] Oh, that's all ——

[*Sam looks at him, hurriedly.*]

All right—all right. [*Goes off—hall door.*]

SAM. [*Coming down.*] Now, say, what yer going to ——

DR. CLOTHIER. My daughter [*breaking off*].
The engagement is almost announced.

SAM. [*Impatiently.*] Well! Why didn't you work *that*?

DR. CLOTHIER. I did. [*Passionately.*] God help me, I did.

SAM. [*Shrugging his shoulders; spreading out his hands.*] Well, then ——

DR. CLOTHIER. My daughter demands a reason ——

SAM. Well, she'll get it [*chuckling*] in to-morrow's paper. [*Rubbing his hands together.*] Yer bet yer life she will. You just keep her away from him to-day, and to-morrow—you wouldn't think she ever knowed him.

[*The doctor is about to speak, checks himself, moistening his lips.*

[*Sam patting him on the back.*

Just yer keep yer fingers off, and go up to that "saw-bones" convencht to-night. [*Enthusiasti-*

cally.] And I'll make it so hot for him in three days that he'll be glad to get out with his skin on. I'll get Hedria ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Looking up, slowly.*] You mean the girl that was here ——

SAM. [*Nodding.*] Yep; she's a good girl and smart. She ain't got long, but she'll do what I tell her and she's got a grudge about this here certificate. She'll go there to-night. He's living down alone in the old Wanner House. Some fool settlement business. It's a bad night and what with her cough, he won't kick her out. To-morrow morning we'll get a message for the Assistant District Attorney ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Wetting his lips.*] District Attorney?

SAM. Yep—Garvin. [*As the Doctor gives him a quick look; enthusiastically.*] Garvin's all right, he is. [*Spreading out his hands.*] Well, she'll want him to take her last statement.

[*Patting the Doctor on the back; chuckling.*]
We'll see; we'll see. [*Picking up his hat, starts for the door.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. Sam [*as he pauses, speaking with evident effort*]*—I—I can't do it.*

SAM. [*Spinning around.*] C—an't —

DR. CLOTHIER. Anything else, but not—that. [*Moistening his lips.*] Don't ask me, Sam.

SAM. [*Coming down a step, clapping his hat on to the back of his head; staring at him.*] Ask! [*Ramming his hands into his trouser pockets, his lips curling back.*] Do yer think I'm ASKING?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Raising his head, meeting his look.*] No—but I'll take my chances—I'll own up to the public, how the hospital and the dispensary tempted me.

SAM. [*Mockingly.*] Oh, yes—the Dispensary—and the Hospital. [*Chuckling.*] He—

he—Oh, yes—so would I. [*Rubs his hands together, openly gloating.*]

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Springing to his feet, white with rage.*] I'm done; I've had enough. [*Bringing down his fist on table.*] I wash my hands of you, Sam Weber.

SAM. [*Chuckling.*] That's right — wash 'em. [*Coming down.*] Wash 'em all yer damn please. [*Lowering his voice; his eyes narrowing.*] But—there's some kind of "stink" that don't come off. [*"Dropping down into his collar"; snarling.*] Well, that's me. [*Chuckling.*] He—he—that's me. [*Moving out right chair a little to front of table; sitting slowly, half-facing the doctor.*] I—stick. *Crossing one leg over the other, tilting chair a little, leaning back; thumbs in pockets.*] Say, Doc, don't yer remember when you'se and me was "pals"?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Slowly, the look of passion and defiance going out of his face.*] P—als?

SAM. [*Contemplating the crossed foot as he wiggles it.*] Down on Race. [*As the doctor makes an almost inaudible sound; cocking one eye at him, humorously.*] The women, what went in and [*slowly uncrossing foot, bringing his chair down.*]

[*Dr. Clothier, white to the lips, looks at him, swallowing hard.*]

—came out [*leaning forward, elbows on knees, his eyes like pinheads, his lips curling back*]—in black—boxes.

[*Dr. Clothier raises his head, his face ghastly, expressionless—the face of a dead man.*]

[*Leaning back, thumbs in pockets.*] It was all right, Doc. After yer got on—but [*chuckling*]—till yer did, Doc—till yer did? [*As Dr. Clothier, starting up with a smothered cry, takes a step toward him, then—his face livid—checking himself, draws back—easily.*] Well, why don't yer?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Looking at him contemptuously.*] It's your word against—*mine*.

SAM. No, it ain't.

[*The Doctor, staring, gives him a quick look of fear.*]

It's your word against—papers. [*Dropping his voice, with a quick look around.*] Coroner's papers.

DR. CLOTHIER. [*His hand clutching the side of the table.*] Coroner's? [*Sits down heavily, staring straight in front of him.*]

[*Sam nods easily.*]

[*Moistening his lips, raising his head.*] No!
[*Drawing in his clenched hands, defiantly.*]
It's not true. [*Turning; looking at him scornfully.*] If it had gone that far, you couldn't have stopped it.

SAM. Oh, couldn't I? Law ain't Law, when it's Sam Weber. [*Bringing down chair slowly.*]
It never is—when it's any one that's on [*chuc-*

kling—not in this old town. [*Getting up, carefully replacing chair.*] Say, you ain't no baby; you ought to know—that. [*With a quick side-long look at the Doctor, who sits motionless, his face drawn, haggard—staring into space, he crosses over to mantel and turning, leans up against it, drawing out a toothpick, he begins to half suck, half pick, watching out of the corner of his eyes; there is a moment's pause.*

[*Helen enters; pale, with dark circles under eyes.*

HELEN. [*Beginning to shut the door; in a low voice.*] Father [*seeing Sam, pausing abruptly*—Oh! I didn't see. [*Beginning to retract.*] I'm sorry. [*Catching a glimpse of Dr. Clothier's face, pauses; all anxiety, in a low voice, not quite steady.*] Is anything the matter, father?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Looking away, struggling for composure.*] No, nothing, Helen. [*Swallowing.*] Nothing.

[*Helen hesitates, then going out, shuts door.*]

SAM. [*Looking after her.*] Fine girl, that.

[*The Doctor, drawing in his breath, sharply, gives him a quick look, his eyes smoldering.*]

[*Sam watching, but apparently not noticing; easily.*] A damn sight too fine to have her father hauled into court—for ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*His hand clinching.*] Don't [*his fingers going to his throat; in a hoarse, choking voice*]—don't Sam!

SAM. [*Looking at him coolly.*] Now yer thinking! That's what yer want to do. [*Putting toothpick in pocket.*] Thinking of her, didn't stop him, did it? [*Coming down.*] Well, it better stop you. What she don't know, don't hurt; but what she might know, what *everybody* might know. [*Chuckling.*] Hey, Doc?

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Staring into space—hardly above a whisper.*] N—o ——

SAM. [*Nodding.*] That's right—that is, *that's talking* —— [*As Poleman appears in the doorway, umbrella in hand.*] Well, so long! [*Goes out.*]

POLEMAN. [*Jerking up umbrella in sort of salute intended to be military.*] So long! [*Turning, almost colliding with "Lady in Black"; backing away hurriedly.*] 'Scuse me, lady. [*Exit out of sight.*]

LADY IN BLACK. [*Coming in, shaking out her skirts; all alarm.*] Oh, Doctor, he didn't have anything contagious, did he? [*As the doctor looks up, his face haggard, worn, noting something wrong; anxiously.*] Oh, Doctor, I am afraid I am a little early, but I just read ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*With an effort, regaining his official manner.*] Why, not at all —— [*Crosses toward office door.*]

LADY IN BLACK. [*Following.*] I just read in the paper, some horrid scientist ——

DR. CLOTHIER. [*Opening door.*] This way, please ——

LADY IN BLACK. Has discovered a hundred germs to a salad leaf—and you know ——

[*They go out, the door closes. “Lady with Dog,” “Old Gentleman,” and several others come in, glance at clock, then take seats near door.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*A room in what was once a fashionable mansion—long, narrow and with two shadeless windows—right. The walls bare and stained, showing traces of having been papered. The woodwork and moulding, after the heavy colonial style, is stained and worn. A door, leading out into a long narrow hall, shows, when open, a long, high, narrow fluted banister rail, half-broken—left. To the left of it—further up stage—a marble mantelpiece, on which is a medical case, bottles and a silver-framed photograph. On the other side of the mantel a row of hooks on which a few overcoats, hats, etc., hang. The back wall is bare, except for a large medical cabinet, filled with bottles, etc., a telephone, a very complete set of electric batteries, X-ray, etc. An electric wire runs across to office table desk,*

which stands down front—center—lighting a large student lamp. A door tube is attached to the table—a swivel desk chair stands center back of table facing the audience—a straight wooden chair to the left of it. Several others stand around the walls. Down stage, near right, a heavy old-fashioned couch—very large and comfortable. As the curtain rises, the stage is in semi-darkness, lighted only by the lamp, and a few rays of light, which come in from the broken slats of the shutters.

SALLIE. [*A bedraggled, sodden-looking creature, looking any age over forty, who has been crouching before the cabinet—rising, looking backwards—savagely.*] Darn it all. [*Prying and picking at the door of the cabinet—as it opens—with a muffled sigh of satisfaction.*] Ah! [*Peering in; disgusted.*] Pshaw! [*Pulling out empty bottles, holding them up to the light—grunting.*] I'm going to give notice, that's what

I am. I ain't going to work. [*Breaking off, pulling out chafing dish—opening the lamp; rising, coming down to table, her eyes gloating.*] Only a drop—only a —— [*Drinks, smacking her lips.*] Ah! [*Running her fingers around the inside, licking them, regretfully*—drop. [*Stops, listening, then makes a dive to the closet, piles in bottles, chafing dish; slams the door; seizing broom, begins sweeping vigorously, with eye on the door—stops, crouching in the shadow, dustpan in one hand, brush in the other. As the door opens slowly, cautiously and Hedria comes in, shutting the door behind her noiselessly, Sallie, rises and comes forward aggressively. As Hedria comes in further, and stands peering into the semi-darkness—sharply.*] What d'yer want?

HEDRIA. [*Starting; turns; hoarsely.*] The doctor —— [*Puts her hand to her throat.*

SALLIE. [*Shrilly.*] Well, he ain't here —— [*Picking up broom, beginning to sweep vigor-*

ously, looking up as Hedria sits on the chair, left of door, irritably.] He ain't here. Didn't ye hear me?

HEDRIA. [*Without looking up.*] Yes.

SALLIE. [*Moving chairs and rugs.*] Then what ye waiting for?

HEDRIA. [*In the same tone.*] The doctor.

SALLIE. [*Sweeping violently toward Hedria.*] And how ye think I'm going to clean while ye're waitin'?

[*Hedria gets up, coughing and choking from the dust, crosses over to chair, left side of table. The light now shines on her face.*

[*Sallie stops; looks at her; awed.*] My! ain't yer got it bad. Pretty near as bad as Mamie Guiger. [*Leaning on her broom.*] I guess yer didn't know Mamie?

HEDRIA. [*Holding her side; gasping.*] N—o.

SALLIE. Well, she certainly had a fine lay-out — My! I never seen a finer. A lavender coffin, all plush outside and a wreath of wax flowers and gates ajar; and the girls at the match factory sent her a clock all “immorels.” That’s where she took it, yer know. It’s the sulphur, they say. [*Sighing.*] She certainly was a nice, industrious girl, Mamie was. She’d laid by near three hundred dollars. Why, say—the whiskey. You ought to seen it—you’d thought it was water. [*Softly.*] My! [*Beginning to sweep, wearily.*] But it don’t do no good. It ain’t no use. [*Looking up.*] I suppose you’ve heard a harmonica?

HEDRIA. [*Weakly; gasping.*] Y-e-s.

SALLIE. [*Dropping broom—coming down convulsively—passionately.*] But ye don’t hear it morning, noon and night—with a wheeze in it—like the one John bought when we were married—the one we used to sing to Sunday

mornings. [*Passionately.*] It's worse than snakes. I know; I had them both. The snakes they just crawl around, but the harmonica [*clinchin' her hands*]*—it just keeps a wailin' and a wailin'.* You can't drink it out. Even at Mamie's I heard it. They said it was a hymn, but I knowed it wasn't. It was John's voice a-singing "Home, Sweet Home." [*Breaking out, clinchin' her hands over her ears.*] Oh, Lord! ain't it ever goin' to stop? [*Coming across to Hedria—her voice dropping into a whine.*] Say, yer ain't got the price of a drink, have ye?

HEDRIA. [*Bitterly.*] Do I look it?

SALLIE. [*Shaking her head.*] No, but there's no tellin' [*going back, pickin' up broom*]*—there's no tellin'.* [*Starting up back.*] There's old —— [*Breaking off as door slams.*] Lord! [*Hurries to door, cautiously opens it; listening; closing door softly; turning; frightened.*] It's him. [*As Hedria, rising, goes up*

stage into the shadow—queruously shaking out dirty, torn dust rag, beginning to dust violently.] What's he back for? Now he's got a girl he ain't never back before twelve. [*Breaks off, dusting more violently, as the door opens and Peter enters.*

PETER. [*Closing door; turning, and seeing her; sharply.*] Sallie, what are you doing here?

SALLIE. I'm dustin'.

PETER. At eleven o'clock at night? [*Coming down, puts doctor's bag on table, impatiently.*] Don't lie.

SALLIE. [*Defiantly.*] Lying? Who's a lying? Do you think the dust is particular about the time? Well, it ain't and here's me [*beginning to collect brushes and broom and bucket*]*—morning and night, a-workin' my fingers to the bone to keep yer place decent, and it's all the thanks I get. If ye ain't careful, Mr. Macline, I'll join the union.*

PETER. [*Wearily; slipping out of his coat.*] I wish to God you would.

SALLIE. [*Venomously.*] And I will. [*As he crosses over, coat in hand, toward hooks, catching sight of the half-opened cupboard doors—getting between it and him, in a nervous flutter.*] And then you'll find out what a fine, honest woman you've lost.

PETER. [*Sighing.*] All right. [*Turning, patiently.*] Now, go home, Sallie.

SALLIE. Home? Aye, home! With not even a bed to lie in?

PETER. [*Looking up, half-contemptuously, half-pityingly.*] So you've sold *that*?

SALLIE. [*Hurriedly.*] No—I didn't—no—no—I didn't. A—A—man came and took it. [*As Peter sits down and begins to write; wearily—pleadingly.*] Mister Maclin, won't you give me something—just the price of a drop? For the love of heaven—just a drop.

PETER. [*Sharply.*] No! [*Handing her a slip of paper.*] Take that to Mosser. He'll give you a decent room to-night. [*Pointing to cloth as she picks it up from table.*] And don't bring that dirty rag around here again. It hasn't been washed since you got it.

SALLIE. [*Spitefully.*] My, but ye's got the grouch on. [*Going to door.*] I bet yer girl's given you the shake. [*As Peter, with a smothered exclamation, starts to his feet.*] All right—all right; I'm goin'. [*Opening door; maliciously.*] I ain't afeard ye'll be lonely. [*Chuckling.*] Ha! ha! [*Goes out.*]

[*Peter crosses to mantel; stands for a moment looking at photograph, then picks it up, recrosses to table, sitting down heavily, holding photograph before him, under light.*]

PETER. [*Looking at it; in a low, choking whisper.*] Little girl—little girl.

[*Hedria, coming down noiselessly, slips into chair beside table.*

[*Peter—his face working—shakes his head slowly, then becoming conscious of an indefinite something; looks up, his face rigid; looking around, abruptly; seeing her, starts, snapping on the electric bracket, as he recognizes her; half rising; abruptly.*] You?

HEDRIA. [*Looking at him without moving.*] Yes.

PETER. [*Rising; facing her; sharply.*] What do you want?

HEDRIA. My certificate.

PETER. Your —— [*Impatiently.*] I told you you can't have it.

HEDRIA. [*Hoarsely.*] Why?

PETER. [*Impatiently.*] It's no use going into it—you couldn't understand.

HEDRIA. [*Savagely.*] I guess I wouldn't. [*Leaning across the table, clutching his sleeve;*

in a low, hoarse voice.] The other girls; they always got theirs. [*Tightening her grip.*] Why shouldn't I get mine—why? [*Moving closer; pleadingly, her voice breaking.*] I ain't asking much. It won't be for long and I don't eat much. [*Breaking down; burying her face between her arms; moaning.*] It's just a place—to die in.

PETER. [*Looking at her, his face softening.*]
I am sorry, Hedria.

HEDRIA. [*Looking up, eagerly.*] Then you'll give it to me—you'll give it to me. [*As Peter's face hardens; passionately.*] Oh, God! You'll give it to me?

PETER. [*Turning abruptly.*] No.

[*Hedria sinks back; coughing and choking; crossing to other side of room.*]

[*Turning and facing her, sharply.*] You're Sam's girl; now, go back to Sam.

HEDRIA. [*Looking up; in a muffled, choking*

voice.] Go back to Sam? [*In a low voice; her fingers lacing and interlacing.*] There's only one girl that ever—came back. [*Breaking off with a shudder.*] No, I guess I don't. [*Rising, clinging to the table, facing him; swaying to and fro.*] I never done nothing to you. [*Choking.*] I ain't ever seen you. Why won't yer give it to me?

PETER. [*Turning; savagely.*] Because I am going to try to put an end to this. [*As Hedria stares at him, swaying a little.*] I am going to stop making it easy for Sam.

HEDRIA. [*Raising her head; hoarsely.*] So that's it, is it? That's your game. [*As Peter nods.*] You're a reformer; and you're going to begin like the rest of them [*coughing and choking*]*—on us [bitterly, savagely, scornfully]**—on the girls. [Facing Peter; her eyes blazing, her hands clinching.]* That's right—that is. We're devils; we ought to pay. It ain't our

bread and clothes. Oh, no! It's just for the fun of it. [*Vehemently; laughing hoarsely.*] Ho! ho! For the fun of it. [*Coming around to his side of the table as Peter, raising his head, looks at her—through her teeth.*] And—the men? [*As he stares at her, laughing.*] Oh! oh! That's different—it's just their wild oats; it don't matter. Somebody else can pay the price. [*Shrilly.*] THE PRICE—that's what I am—the price of a night off. I'm one of "Old Mammy Meyers's kids." The kind she took in and no questions asked. They mostly all died [*sinking down on chair, hopelessly, with a choking sob*—but I—I didn't. [*Coughing and choking.*] Sam says I was the strongest kid he ever seen.

PETER. [*Taking a step toward her, his mouth squaring.*] Sam? Sam—Weber?

HEDRIA. [*Nodding wearily.*] When the Society got busy and Mammy "skipped," Sam

took me in. He had to; he was afraid they'd catch on. [*Her fingers shutting.*] I—I might have—talked.

PETER. [*Looking at her with a growing look of pity; slowly.*] But—your—your—mother, Hedria?

HEDRIA. [*Laughing a little.*] My—mother. [*As if to herself; in a low, dead tone.*] Sam says he thinks the man she married got hold of some of Mammy's letters. Anyway, he kicked her out and she went—to the devil. [*Wheeling around, with sudden suppression of fury.*] But him—the man ——— [*Through her clinched teeth.*] The man that's my father. The man I wasn't more to than a bad taste in the morning ——— Nothing happened to him, I guess. [*Raising her clinched hands.*] Nothing ever happens to them. It's all very pleasant and nice. It's made so damned easy—for them. But for us [*rising; facing him furiously*]*—for us—*

ACT II



there ain't even a place to die in. [*Stands, clutching chairback; exhausted.*]

PETER. [*Coming down slowly, putting his hand over the hand that grips the chair; speaking with an effort—unsteadily—looking at her.*] Hedria, if I could do anything—in any other—— [*Breaking off.*] But [*slowly*] I can't.

HEDRIA. [*Jerking her hand away from him; facing him; through her teeth.*] You can't—and you wouldn't. [*Putting her hand to her side, gasping.*] And your preacher friend wouldn't. [*Dropping down into chair; with a choking sob.*] None of you'se would. [*Staring straight in front of her; in a hoarse, choking voice filled with passion.*] He'd—he'd talk of hell and the rest of it. [*Clinching her hands; in a whisper.*] But it only stays hell for the woman. A man can have six brats like me and a girl like yours 'll marry him, and—the

Preacher [*through her teeth*]*—the Preacher 'll do the marrying. He'll talk of contrition. [Laughing savagely.] Contrition! [Drawing in her clinched fingers, her eyes glittering—through her teeth.] There's a Hell, and that's where he'll find them, the six of them, lined up, waiting for their father. [Raising her head, her eyes glowing—all hate—in a whisper.] As I'll be waiting for—mine. [Rising and drawing herself up, her head thrown back; facing him.] Now—do I get a place to die in?*

PETER. Hedria, if I give you the certificate, I tie my hands as they have tied —— [*Breaking off.*

[Hedria sits down slowly, exhausted.]

I'd give you a place to go to—go—to. [*Passionately.*] It isn't the money, God knows it isn't; but it means that the next girl comes with another story as bad as yours ——

HEDRIA. [*Clinching her hands.*] Mine's true.

PETER. They mostly all are—God help us; and so—you see—I can't, Hedria —— I must try to stop it—NOW.

HEDRIA. [*With a choking sob.*] You're going to begin—on me?

PETER. I must. [*As Hedria looks at him, as if hardly comprehending, her lips trembling; turning away abruptly, walking up stage.*] I'll mix you something that will help your cough and you go back to Sam. He'll take you in—he's got to.

HEDRIA. [*Looking up, her hand to her throat.*] Oh, yes; he'll take me in—like [*smiling horribly*]*—he took in—Rosie March. [Turning away from him, wearily; in a low, listless voice, as if repeating a lesson.]* Then you won't give it to me?

PETER. [*Turning on electric light; taking out bottle.*] No. [*As the call-bell rings; pouring contents of bottle carefully into mixing*

glass; looking up, annoyed.] Will you answer? Unless it's something important, I'm not in.

HEDRIA. [*Picking up the tube.*] Y-e-s? [*Her eyes suddenly lightening, with a quick look towards Peter; dropping her voice.*] I'll see ——— [*Snapping up tube, turning, her eyes glistening; hoarsely.*] You won't give it to me?

PETER. [*Putting back bottle.*] No.

HEDRIA. [*Her fingers clinching and unclenching; breathlessly.*] S-u-r-e?

PETER. Yes. [*Pouring contents of mixing glass into new bottle.*]

HEDRIA. [*Taking down tube.*] Yes; come right up.

PETER. [*Starting.*] What? [*Turning sharply.*] Why did you say that?

HEDRIA. [*Looking at him, her eyes gloating.*] It's very important.

[*Peter, turning off light, comes down; unmistakably irritated, opening desk, takes out bottle-label.*]

[As he sits down on swivel chair, pasting on label; clutching his arm, her voice trembling.]

Won't you have pity—won't you?

PETER. *[Shaking himself loose; sharply.]*
No. I've told you—why I can't, and *that's the end of it.* *[Picks up pen and begins to write directions.]*

HEDRIA. *[Looking at him; in a whisper, her fingers clinching.]* Yes—that's the end of it — *[Crosses over right, into the shadow of the windows, as there is a knock on the door.]*

PETER. *[Without looking up.]* Come in.

[Helen appears in the doorway, hesitates for a minute, then shuts door gently.]

[Looking up as door closes.] Well — *[Seeing, starting to his feet, with a cry.]*
Helen! *[Looking at her incredulously.]*
You — *[As she nods slowly, her eyes shining, very moist; taking three steps toward her, his voice trembling.]* Little Girl —

HELEN. [*Coming down quickly.*] Peter, I've come—I want the truth—THE REAL TRUTH.

PETER. You haven't [*looking past her with sudden anxiety*—you haven't come here without anybody else —

HELEN. Without anybody knowing —

PETER. [*His fingers gripping the edges of the table unsteadily.*] You had no right, Little Girl; you don't understand. You—if any one should see —

HELEN. [*Looking at him, steadily.*] It was the only way; they almost seemed to be watching me, and [*her voice trembling*—and father would tell me nothing — [*Her hand clinching.*] Nothing. [*In a low, broken whisper.*] Peter—— [*As he half-turns away; pleadingly.*] I love you, and the man I love—I trust. That is why I ask you—to tell me the truth. [*Putting her hand on his arm—all pleading.*] A girl can't throw off the man she loves—like an

old shoe—not even for one [*her voice trembling*—for one who has been mother and father to her — [With a stifled sob.] Not even for Daddie. [*As he, wheels and with a sudden passionate gesture, seizes her hands, crushes them to his lips; looking at him, her eyes shining.*] What is the — [Over Peter's bent head, suddenly seeing Hedria, who has moved out of the shadow; her eyes widening—in a whisper.] I didn't see — [Drawing away slowly.] I—didn't see —

HEDRIA. [*Coming down to left of table, leaning forward, her hands gripping the edge; hoarsely—her eyes glittering.*] You want the truth, do you? [*Through her teeth, flinging back her head.*] Well, that's what I am—the real truth—the whole truth—the —

PETER. [*Wheeling around, savagely.*] What do you mean?

HEDRIA. [*Looking at him; jeering, trium-*

phant, gloating.] You know what I mean—you know what I —— [Breaks off with a cry, as he, with a quick gesture, seizes both her wrists in his.] Oh! [Trying to pull away.] Curse you!

PETER. [*His left hand pinning Hedria's wrists, turning and facing Helen; deadly white.*] Helen, go [*as she looks at him, her eyes widening; pleadingly*—please. I'll come in a minute.

HEDRIA. [*Withering in Peter's grasp.*] Yes—go. [*Jeeringly.*] You needn't worry; he'll see you home. [*Through her teeth.*] After he's kicked me into the gutter.

HELEN. [*Coming down a step, looking at Peter; in a low, unsteady voice.*] What does she mean?

PETER. I'll explain—but not here, Helen—not now—to-morrow.

HEDRIA. [*Furiously.*] To-morrow ——

[*Jerking one hand loose; laughing.*] Oh! yes, to-morrow. [*Dropping down into chair, utterly exhausted.*] I'll be dead to-morrow, and the dead don't say nothin', they don't. [*Burying her head in her free arm; with a sob.*] They're dead. [*Coughs. Peter releases her other hand, but watches her closely.*]

HELEN. [*In a whisper; white to the lips.*]
Dead?

HEDRIA. Yes—— Dead in the gutter. What does he care? He's got you now. Curse you.

PETER. [*Facing Helen; passionately.*]
Helen, it's lies. I never saw the girl till to-day. I give you my word.

HEDRIA. [*Interrupting, laughing shrilly.*]
His word! [*Leaning forward, her hands clinching.*] I didn't know no more than you'se. I didn't know a damn thing—I [*breaking off, struggling with her cough; hoarsely, in a whisper*—and that's what he gave me—*his word.*]

HELEN. I don't believe it. [*Coming quite close to her.*] I don't know why you are saying it—but it's a lie. [*Turning toward Peter; her voice breaking.*] Peter, take me away. [*As he crosses to her; clinging to him; breaking down.*] Take me home.

HEDRIA. [*Springing to her feet, her voice vibrating with rage, with hate; shrilly.*] Yes, take her home—to the man who kicked you out—to her father.

HELEN. [*Starting, raising her head.*] Father? [*She moves back a little, away from Peter.*]

HEDRIA. [*Through her teeth; scornfully.*] Your father. He ain't no fool. *He* knows the truth when he sees it—— [*Dropping down into chair, coughing and choking.*] *He—knows.*

HELEN. [*Looking at her; in a whisper.*] *Knows!* [*Crossing over to Hedria—swiftly; puts her hand on her shoulder, almost roughly.*] Is *this* what you told him—*my father?*

HEDRIA. [*Nodding, exhausted, in a whisper.*] The whole of it. [*Clutching Helen's arm; her eyes blazing.*] The whole of it—do you hear?

HELEN. [*Shaking herself loose.*] Yes, I hear.

PETER. [*Starting forward, passionately.*] Helen!

HEDRIA. [*Clutching her dress, her fingers like talons; panting.*] Your father kicked him out; he sent him back to me. He tried to make him give me a place to die in—and he won't. [*Flinging out her arms on the table, dropping her head between them, shaking with sobs.*] He won't do—it ——

PETER. Helen—your father ——

HELEN. [*Shrinking away from him.*] My —father—asked me to believe in him—to —— [*Breaking off in a choking whisper.*] And—and I—I —— [*With a shuddering cry.*] Oh!

[Turning and running blindly towards the door, tearing it open.] Oh, Daddie! Daddie! Daddie! *[Runs out.]*

PETER. *[Staring after her, passionately.]*
Helen —— *[Starting towards the door.]* You shall listen—you shan't ——

[The front door is heard to slam. He stops—staring out into the hall. Hedria's head falls forward on her arms.]

HEDRIA. *[As he comes in, closing the door, raising her head a little—with unseeing eyes—in a hoarse, lifeless voice.]* You can do what you want—I—I'm even.

CURTAIN.

ACT III



ACT III.

SCENE.—*Same as Act II. Time, seven o'clock the next morning.*

The blind furthest down stage is still lowered; the blind up stage, half-raised, puts the back part of stage into a half-light. A few broken slats allow three or four rays to fall across front of stage, partly lighting up lounge on which lays Hedria—eyes closed—breathing heavily. She is covered with a heavy blanket shawl. At the foot, rocking to and fro, holding her ears, sits Whiskey Sallie, more bedraggled and sodden than ever, in the daylight. On a chair to the left lies Hedria's skirt, hat, jacket and shoes. An ambulance bell sounds in the street. Sallie looks up, listening. As the bell sounds again, right below the windows [rising hurriedly, starts toward lower window;

eagerly.] Somebody's got hurted. [*Peeps out through broken slat; starting.*] Say, if it ain't — [The call-bell rings *peremptorily; looking across at it; muttering.*] Wh-what yer w-want? [*As it rings again, louder; looking around room.*] Yer—yer got the—the wrong house. [*Crosses over toward it, as it rings again, steadily, without stopping.*] Can't yer see I'm coming — [*Taking off receiver.*] Well, what yer want? [*Sharply.*] No, there ain't nobody here—no, there ain't—neither. There ain't no sick woman. Why, say, I guess I ought to know. No, I ain't going to open no door fer youse. I? I'm the lady what keeps his room. No, there ain't no ambulance call for me. I don't ever get nothing but the "hurry-up wagon," I don't. [*Chuckling.*] He—he — [*Drawling out the words.*] A-ll right—I'll—I'll—te-ll him. [*Snaps up the receiver, listening intently.*]

[*The ambulance sounds again, then again at a distance.*

[*Laughing.*] He—he! Say [*coming down*], won't Sam be hot [*looking around; dropping her voice*—if he'd know. [*Coming down further.*] But he won't [*looking around craftily*—he won't know nothin'. [*Sitting down on end of sofa.*] I want—my money. [*Shivering.*] I want money b-bad. [*Looking across at Hedria.*] I—I wouldn't go back on the doctor if I—if weren't fer the—money. The doctor's been good to me, he has. He—he's been mighty good to me —— [*Her words trailing off into mutterings, she falls back into original position. Rocking to and fro, faster, then slower, as in time to music, hands to her ears; suddenly flinging out hands, hoarsely.*] Oh, Lord, ain't it ever goin' to stop? [*Rocking to and fro.*] Ain't it ever —— [*Breaks off, listening intently, turning, in a whisper.*] Is that [*rising and shuffling around end of sofa*—you, Mister?

THE DEAN. [*Opening door, standing in the doorway, blinking at her.*] Is Dr. Maclain in?

SALLIE. [*Aggressively.*] No, he ain't. [*Edging over between him and Hedria—as Helen appears in the doorway—sharply.*] What yer want?

THE DEAN. [*Coming in; curtly.*] I'll explain that to the doctor. [*Turning to Helen; anxiously.*] You'll wait, Helen?

HELEN. [*Turning away.*] Y-e-s. [*Goes over to center and sits down on chair right of table; her face turned from him.*]

THE DEAN. [*Coming down toward her; tenderly.*] Little girl——

HELEN. [*Shrinking.*] Please don't—— [*Her hand working.*] Please. He—he—used to call me—that. [*Struggling for self-control.*] You are asking a great deal of me—Dean.

THE DEAN. For Justice—one always does.

HELEN. [*Raising her head.*] Justice!

[*Repeating it in a whisper.*] Justice. [*Turning, facing him, her eyes burning.*] Don't you think, father—just? And he [*turning away again*]*—he believed.*

THE DEAN. [*Quietly.*] I am here to *know*, not to *think*, Helen. [*She looks up, startled.*] Whatever is the truth I want to know it [*emphasizing it*]*—and I want you to know it. That is why, when you sent for me this morning —*

HELEN. [*Breaking out; rising.*] I couldn't bear it any longer. [*Walking up stage.*] All night—I [*breaks off, shuddering; slowly*]*—and Daddy hadn't come back—yet [putting her handkerchief to her trembling lips]—Daddie hadn't come back yet.*

THE DEAN. [*Looking at her, tenderly; gravely.*] Helen, I asked you to come back with me because there is something I don't understand. [*As she turns and looks at him, turns away to avoid her eyes. Coming down stage.*]

The more I put things together, the less I [*suddenly seeing Hedria, startled*]*—O-h— [bends over couch.*

HELEN. [*Her eyes widening with terror.*]
What is it? What [*coming down slowly*]*—is there?*

SALLIE. [*Indignantly.*] Say, now ——

THE DEAN. [*Sharply.*] Be quiet.

HELEN. [*Seeing Hedria, as she recognizes her.*] Oh! [*Bending down, looks at her, straightening up; in a whisper.*] He—at least he didn't drive her out into the gutter, Dean. He didn't do that.

THE DEAN. Yes—but —— [*Looking up with a sudden look of determination.*] Helen, if the thing was true, do you think she could have come into your father's office—*AS SHE DID COME.* Do you think he would have stood there as he did stand—and let her come?

HELEN. [*Looking up, startled.*] I—never thought of that.

THE DEAN. But I did; I thought of it all along. [*As Helen, her face whitening—starts to speak—turning away quickly. To Sallie; sharply.*] Where's the Doctor?

SALLIE. [*Sneeringly.*] How do I know? [*Glancing at him, maliciously.*] It ain't none of your business.

THE DEAN. [*Crossing over to her; steadily.*] It is my business. Where's the Doctor?

SALLIE. [*With an anxious look at the door; beginning to whine.*] It's old Izzy Jaret. He—he's broke a—leg. [*Craftily.*] Yer better come back. [*As Helen, with a half-suppressed shudder, turns to go up stage, shuffling across to her; whining.*] Say, ain't yer got the price of a drink? She's been asking and asking—for just a drop, just one?

HELEN. [*Looking across at the Dean.*] Would it hurt her?

THE DEAN. [*With a shade of bitterness in*

his voice.] No, it won't hurt—her. [*Reaches in his pocket.*]

HELEN. [*Hurriedly, her voice not quite steady.*] Let me —— [*Draws out pocketbook, opens it and takes out coin—to Sallie.*] Could you get it?

SALLIE. It's just a step to the corner—just a step. [*Holding out her hand, greedily.*]

THE DEAN. [*As she almost snatches the coin out of Helen's hands—looking at her; sharply.*] Will you bring it back?

SALLIE. [*Indignantly; edging toward the door.* Do yer think I'd forget the poor girl? [*Opening door, with a quick, malignant look at Helen.*] I ain't like—him.

HELEN. [*Looking after her, in a whisper—her hand clinching.*] Like him! Even she says it. [*Turning away with a stifled cry.*] Oh! [*Going up stage, drops into chair, to right of stage.*]

[*The Dean, looking after her for a moment, turns with a suppressed sigh, back to Hedria.*

[*Helen, shivering as she sits, speaking in a low, convulsed voice.*] I—I can't bear it. I—I came because you asked me. I went to you because you were the only one I knew—because I thought you cared. And you—you brought me back here, to go through it all again ——

THE DEAN. [*Turning.*] Hush —— [*Speaking as he crosses over to her.*] The girl's [*putting his hand on her shoulder, gently.*]—dying, Helen.

HELEN. [*Starting.*] Dy-ing? [*As he nods slowly—looking around the room, her eyes widening, incredulously.*] Here—alone in this room—with only that horrible woman?

[*The Dean starts to speak, checks himself, listening intently.*

[Helen also listening, clutches his arm, her face strained, breathless.]

[The sound of footsteps grows louder, more distinct. The door opens and Sam Weber looks in. The look of relief which has come into Helen's face changes, with a start, to one of recognition.]

SAM. *[Coming in reassuringly.]* It's all—
ri ——— *[Breaking off, as he sees The Dean.]*
What in the hell are you doing here?

[Poleman and Garvin appear hesitatingly in the doorway.]

THE DEAN. *[Facing him.]* That is my question exactly, sir.

SAM. *[Snickering.]* Oh, is it?

[To Garvin and Poleman.] Come on, come on ———

[Helen, leaning forward, her eyes on Sam, talks rapidly to the Dean, who, listening, looks at Sam, his lips compressed.]

[*Sam jerking his head in their direction, muttering.*] Old Hag must have let them in.

THE DEAN. [*Coming down a step, very alert and bright-eyed.*] On the contrary, I opened the door myself. As a personal friend of Dr. Maclain. I know where the key is kept. [*Bitterly.*] Are you a personal friend, also?

SAM. [*Savagely.*] Not much—I ain't no friend of his'n—I'm the poor girl's friend.

[*Helen starts, a look of loathing and repulsion comes into her face as she watches.*

POLEMAN. That's what. [*Pulling back his hat, jerking down his waistcoat, aggressively.*] We're all her friends.

HELEN. [*Shuddering, looking from one to the other, in a whisper.*] Friends——

THE DEAN. Ah! [*Sweetly, inquiringly, turns to Garvin, who is looking most uncomfortable.*] And you—are you also a friend, Mr. Garvin?

GARVIN. [*Twenty-five, very gentlemanly looking; confused.*] Why—why —— [*Hesitates.*]

SAM. [*Quickly.*] No, he ain't. He's here on business. *State's* business.

THE DEAN. [*Staring at him.*] State?

SAM. Yep. So you'd better keep yer fingers off or skip. [*With a look at Helen.*] You 'n yer lady friend.

THE DEAN. [*His face stiffening—in an anxious whisper.*] Helen, this is no place for you. [*Hurriedly, protestingly.*] That is the Assistant District Attorney. [*Swallowing quickly.*] It—it—is not as I —— [*Breaking off as she looks at him quietly—putting his hand on her arm.*] You are too young, child.

SAM. [*Nodding emphatically.*] That's right —this ain't goin' to be no tea party.

HELEN. [*Shaking her head.*] I'm—I'm not young any longer—I —— [*Controlling her-*

self.] It was because of me—you know ——
[*Breaking off.*] Let me stay. I may be of use.
[*Putting her hand on his arm*] Let me stay—
I—I ask it.

SAM. [*Turning away, contemptuously.*]
Pish —— [*Turning, comes down stage.*

[*The Dean, patting her hand, turns away, drawing out his handkerchief, blows his nose vigorously, comes down stage, slowly.*

SAM. [*Stooping over sofa; to Garvin.*]
Here's the girl, Garvin.

[*Garvin comes down, looking sheepish and uncomfortable.*

[*The Dean moves toward them a few steps, leaving Helen standing to right of table.*

POLEMAN. [*Who has taken up position at foot of sofa, dubiously, watching Sam's efforts to rouse Hedria.*] Say, we ought to have come sooner, we ought.

[The Dean, with a quick look, moves nearer.]

SAM. *[With a quick sidelong look at the Dean; to Poleman, savagely.]* Some more light here, will yer?

[Poleman, turning, hurries to window, jerks up blind to the top, letting the sun stream in full on the couch and Hedria, who, turning, buries her face deeper into the pillows, with a half-moan.]

[Sam, coming around to head of sofa, takes up position, his back to audience, looking at Hedria.]

THE DEAN. *[Coming down to right of Garvin, looking at him intently.]* I understand, then, Mr. Garvin, you were sent for?

[Helen, coming down left, stands watching Sam.]

GARVIN. *[Starting.]* Why —— *[Avoiding Helen's eyes, as she looks at him.]* Cer-

tainly—certainly. [*With a quick look toward Helen, flushing.*] An extremely unpleasant ——

THE DEAN. [*Interrupting.*] The girl—sent for you?

GARVIN. Why ——

SAM. [*Looking up, furiously.*] Look a—here, Garvin, we ain't got no time to answer fool questions. She's dying.

POLEMAN. [*Coming back from window, as he passes Garvin; imitating Sam.*] That's right, that is. [*Wagging his head at him.*] First thing you know, you'll go an' blab.

SAM. [*Whirling around on Poleman.*] Will you ——

[*Poleman, subsiding, slinks up back and takes up position near table. Now sitting in chair, now rising and moving up and down.*]

[*To Garvin, as with great show of official*

dignity, crosses to sofa, bending over Hedria.]
Damn it, I can't bring her around. [*Shaking her.*] Hedria! Hedria!

[*The Dean, who has taken up his position at the head of couch, clutches his arm, jerking it away.*

HELEN. [*Taking a step nearer, facing Sam; passionately.*] Don't ——

SAM. [*Glaring from the Dean to Helen.*] Now, yer—don't interfere. This is the law, this is —— [*Shaking her again, but less violently.*] Hedria ——

[*Garvin, as Helen is evidently about to appeal to him, turns abruptly and crosses over to right.*

HEDRIA. [*Opening her eyes, moaning.*] Oh! can't yer leave me alone, Sam? [*Coughing.*] Can't yer see I ain't fit? [*Struggling to a half-sitting position, weakly.*] Which is it—the——
[*Garvin, picking up straightback chair,*

brings it back and sets it down, to the right of Sam, with back to Helen. Sitting, with an air of great determination —drawing out pad and pen.

SAM. [*Savagely, hurriedly.*] No—no ——— [*Pointing to Garvin.*] This is Mister Garvin ——— [*As she stares at him.*] The Assistant District Attorney.

HEDRIA. [*Wonderingly.*] Dis-trict At-tor-ney?

SAM. Yes—yes ——— Come to hear yer story ———

HEDRIA. M— story?

SAM. Yes—about Doctor Maclain ——— [*As she stares at him.*] What he's done for yer ———

HEDRIA. What he done?

SAM. [*Savagely.*] Yes. Yer wanted to get even, Hedria. You want to tell yer story.

[Helen comes around back of sofa, taking up her stand facing Sam, and, incidentally, Garvin.]

HEDRIA. [*Putting her hand to her head.*]
I—I—can't think —— You—you tell it, Sam.
Tell anything you want —— [*Dropping back,
closing her eyes.*] I'll—swear to—it.

SAM. [*Impatiently.*] Now! Now! Hedria.
[*Shaking her roughly.*] Hedria ——

HELEN. [*As the Dean starts forward, his
eyes blazing—her hand closing on Sam's wrist—
looking at him.*] Stop!

SAM. [*Wrenching loose.*] Will yer ——
[*To Hedria, but not touching her.*] Hedria,
yer ain't goin' to bring Mister Garvin here for
nothin'? Yer sent for him —— That's what.
Now, come sit up. [*Putting his arm around
her, getting her in a sitting position.*] That's
the girl. [*Stuffing pillows behind her, roughly.*

HEDRIA. [*Coughing and shivering.*] I—
I'm so cold ——

[*The Dean slips off his overcoat. Helen,
taking it, puts it around Hedria.*

SAM. Cold? That's easy ——

[*To Poleman.*] Got yer bot?

POLEMAN. [*Searching through his pockets.*]

Nope. [*Comes down a little, scratching his head.*]

THE DEAN. If it is stimulants you want—I have sent for some.

SAM. [*Looking up.*] Yer did, did yer?
[*Sharply.*] Who'd yer send?

THE DEAN. The woman I found here.

SAM. Sallie—Whiskey Sallie? [*Tittering.*]
He! Say, did yer think she'd come back ——
[*Breaks off, as the call-bell rings in jerks without stopping.*]

[*Poleman hurries toward it, but the Dean steps between and picks up the receiver.*]

THE DEAN. Well? [*Listens, quietly, as if to some one speaking.*] Very well. [*Looking across at Sam, meaningly.*] THE STIMULANTS
HAVE COME. [*Snaps up receiver.*]

POLEMAN. [*Giving way to his feelings, which Sam almost suppresses, but not quite.*] The Devil! [*Hurriedly.*] Here, I'll get them. [*Starts toward door.*]

HELEN. [*Crossing quickly.*] No, I'll do it [*scathingly*], Mr. Poleman. [*Goes out quickly, shutting door.*]

SAM. [*Turning, facing the Dean, his lips curling back.*] Now, look a-here ——

THE DEAN. [*Meeting look for look.*] I'm looking; I'm looking hard [*accenting it*], Sam Web-er.

[*The door opens and Sallie enters, followed by Helen.*]

SALLIE. [*Coming down, not quite steadily, carrying a quart bottle, with about a pint of whiskey in it; leering at Sam.*] Say, yer thought you'd lock me out, didn't yer? [*Chuckling.*] Yer smart, Sam, yer mighty smart, but yer ain't so smart as a woman when

she's got liq-u-or in he—her— and [*dropping her voice*]*—wants more. [Looking at him, gloatingly.] Lots more. [As Sam, coming down, tries to snatch flask from her; drawing back.] You'll get it when [leering at him]—*I get my ten dollars.

SAM. [*Staring at her.*] I never said nothin' about no ten.

SALLIE. [*Chuckling.*] May be yer didn't; may be yer didn't; may be yer said two. But then yer didn't know nothin' about the—the—ambulance.

[*Sam starts visibly; Poleman opens his mouth, but, a quick look from Sam, shuts it again.*

[*Sallie, jeeringly.*] Say, what do yer think the Doctor 'll do when he finds I wouldn't let 'em take her 'way? [*Triumphantly.*] No—I—I wouldn't. [*Chuckling.*] I—wouldn't let 'em in.

SAM [*Furiously.*] Will yer ——

SALLIE. All—right—all right; but if yer don't know what the doctor 'll say—I do—and two bats don't pay fer it. I says ten and yer'll say ten. Yer know [*jerking head in direction of Helen and the Dean, significantly*]*—when the boot's on the wrong foot. [Chuckling.]* Yer bet yer do.

SAM. [*Turning back, his face purple; savagely, to Hedria, bending over her, holding out cup.*] Here, yer ——

HELEN. [*Coming around sofa, holding out her hand; quietly.*] Let me give it to her ——

SAM. [*Meeting her look, handing it to her; grudgingly.*] As you like. [*Crossing over to table—right.*]

HELEN. [*Slipping down on her knees beside Hedria; holding up cup to Hedria's lips; in a whisper.*] Hedria! Hedria!

[*Hedria opens her eyes slowly, a look of*

hate comes into them for a moment; she looks at her, then looking away, swallows with evident difficulty.

SAM. [*Putting down bottle; to Sallie, below his breath.*] I'll remember this!

SALLIE. [*Leering at him.*] That's right. That's [*breaks off as he turns, with a muttered imprecation; and goes back to Hedria, her eyes riveting on the bottle, her fingers twitching*]—all—ri-ght.

SAM. [*Coming around to the left of sofa, taking the cup away from Helen.*] She's had enough of that. That ain't whiskey; it's "Schnapps." [*Sitting down on end of sofa, setting the cup on the floor.*] It'd kill her. [*Slipping his arm around back of Hedria, pulling her forward.*] Now, yer all right, ain't yer?

[*Helen rises slowly, and returns to original position, back of sofa.*

HEDRIA. [*Utterly exhausted; in a whisper.*] Y-es.

SAM. [*Turning to Garvin.*] Now, this here girl's name is Hedria Meyers. Ain't it, Hedria?

HEDRIA. [*With closed eyes.*] I—guess ——
[*Helen looks at Garvin steadily as he writes it down.*]

SAM. That's right.

[*To Garvin, irritably, as he fumbles with his papers, evidently much disconcerted.*] Got that down?

GARVIN. [*With a quick and nervous look at Helen; writing.*] Ye-s—Hedria Meyers; yes—yes.

SAM. [*Pulling Hedria forward, roughly.*]
[*Helen puts her hand on his arm, her eyes blazing.*]

[*Sam glares at her for a minute, then slightly relaxes his hold on Hedria.*]

[*To Hedria.*] Now—now. Don't keep him waiting.

[*Helen, bending down, rearranges pillows behind Hedria.*]

[*The Dean, moving a little to the left, now watches Garvin, Helen, Sam.*

[*Sallie sits, her eyes glued on the bottle, evidently trying to resist the temptation.*

HEDRIA. [*Looking around her as if bewildered.*] Waiting?

SAM. [*Sharply.*] Yes, for yer story. Go ahead.

HEDRIA. [*Speaking in a low, hesitating voice.*] My mother and father's [*looking at Sam, hesitating, as he nods*—dead ——

SAM. [*Nodding.*] An "orphant," a poor little "orphant" girl. [*Putting his hand on Hedria's shoulder, his fingers tightening.*

HEDRIA. [*Wincing.*] And I—I—was a [*looking at Sam, his fingers tightening; shrinking away*—working —— [*Looks at him in an uncertain, frightened way.*

SAM. [*Nodding.*] A good honest living.

HEDRIA. And then—and then—I met him —— [*Breaks off.*

SAM. [*Eagerly.*] And then [*as Hedria falters, tightening his fingers*—then ——

HEDRIA. He—he ——

HELEN. [*Defiantly.*] No.

SAM. [*Starting.*] Hey! [*Rising, and facing her; savagely.*] Now, look a-here. I've had enough of yer. [*Sitting down.*] Go on.

[*Sallie, having moved nearer and nearer the bottle, reaches out, takes it, uncorks it, smells, then recorks it and puts it back. Then takes it again, uncorks it, takes a sip, corks and puts it back.*

HELEN. No. [*Putting her hand on Hedria's arm; passionately.*] Hedria, think what you're ——

SAM. [*Springing to his feet in a rage.*] Damn it! Now, out you get ——

THE DEAN. [*Coming between him and Helen, facing him.*] Not until you—"get."

SAM. You *won't*, won't yer? I'll call a policeman.

THE DEAN. Call a policeman, by all means.

[*Sallie reaches for bottle, takes first one sip, then another and another. Now she raises the bottle to her lips, and drinks it; sits, limply clutching it, swaying slightly.*]

SAM. [*Shaking his fist at him.*] By God, I will.

[*Turning to Garvin, querulously.*] Look-a-here, Garvin, look-a-here. [*Jerking his head toward Helen.*] Yer ain't goin' to have the law interfered with, are yer?

GARVIN. [*Greatly flustered.*] As you say, Sam. [*Hurriedly, as Helen, raising her head, looks at him.*] Mr. Weber, painful as it is at times, the law's the law —

HELEN. [*Facing him; passionately.*] And the truth's the truth. Oh! You can see, you must see, it's all lies. [*With a quick, scornful look towards Sam.*] His lies—his —

SAM. [*Whirling around, furiously.*] Now, look a-here, Garvin—look a-here—are you goin' to hear this here [*pointing toward Hedria*])—girl's story or not?

GARVIN. [*Stammering.*] Why — really [*looking at Sam*]—I—I —— [*As Sam looks at him; hurriedly.*] As Mr. Weber says. I'm not here to—to think. I'm merely to take down a statement, a sworn statement.

HELEN. [*Drawing in her breath.*] Oh! [*half-turning away from Garvin.*]

SAM. [*Bringing his fist down on the back of sofa.*] Exactly. [*As Sallie, waking with a start, falls with a crash to the floor; turning, furiously.*] What the hell ——

SALLIE. [*Struggling to her feet; furiously.*] What's yer wake me up for? What yer wake me—up —— [*Suddenly looking up, listening, beginning to sing in a piercing, cracked voice, as if keeping time to an instrument.*] Be it ever so—humble —— Be it ever s-o ——

HEDRIA. [*With a choking sob.*] Oh! Stop it. Stop it. Oh! God, won't some of youse stop it?

SAM. [*Crossing over to Sallie; savagely.*] Here, you. Drop that. [*Seizing her.*] Yer git out of this. [*Half-pulls, half-drags her, still singing, toward the door.*]

[*To Poleman, as he comes in.*] Here, throw her out, will yer?

HELEN. [*Shrinking.*] Oh! Oh! [*Turning away.*] Oh!

SALLIE. [*As Poleman seizes her, waving her arms around feebly.*] Ho-me, S-we-et [*he pulls her out, her voice dying away*—H-om-e.

SAM. [*Slamming the door, coming back; muttering.*] Damn drunken sot. [*Resuming place on sofa, putting his hand on Hedria, as she shrinks away from him; sharply.*] Now, then. [*Trying to pull her back.*]

HEDRIA. [*Breaking out, wildly.*] Oh, ain't

yer goin' to leave me alone? Ain't I *ever* goin' to have no peace? [*Burying her head in the pillows, shivering and coughing.*]

SAM. [*Bending over Hedria; roughly.*] What's the matter with yer? [*Shaking her, but not roughly.*] Come, tell Garvin what happened after you met the Doctor. [*Pulling her back again.*]

HEDRIA. [*Utterly exhausted.*] I—I—don't remember.

SAM. [*Pressing her shoulder savagely.*] Don't yer —— [*She winces away.*] Tell him how he coaxed yer up here.

HEDRIA. [*Hesitatingly.*] He—h-e ——

HELEN. [*Flinging herself on her knees beside her.*] Hedria! Listen to me. [*As she stares straight in front of her, catching her arm.*] No, you *must*, you *shall* listen to me.

[*Hedria turns a little, her eyes contracting.*]

You don't know, you don't realize what you

are doing. You are ruining him. Ruining a man who has never done anything—who has never harmed you. [*As Hedria turns away from her; passionately.*] Oh! you shall not [*with a choking sob*—you shall not. You're dying, Hedria.

HEDRIA. [*Looking at her; slowly, in a whisper.*] Yes, that's right. I ain't much older than—youse, but I'm dying. [*Jerking away, savagely.*] I've lived as youse made me, but I'll die as I please.

HELEN. [*Clutching her arm.*] No—n-no. As you go before God crying mercy—be merciful. As you pray for—pity ——

HEDRIA. Pray? [*With a little dry, bitter laugh; looking straight before her.*] No—I guess I won't pray. [*Slowly, as if to herself.*] I used—to. I seen it in the papers they'd bring about—praying—about getting what you ask for [*her voice quivering; smiling a little*]—

and I used to ask for a chance—just one. [*Turning and facing Helen; her eyes blazing.*] And now, you come here—you and the rest of youse—asking mercy and pity. Youse—who'd a walked in the gutter than touch me. [*Laughing.*] Me—— Youse never asked—youse never cared—I wasn't fit to talk about. [*Looking at her; slowly*] I can't talk like youse—I ain't got the words. [*In a low, vibrating voice, trembling with passion.*] I ain't got nothing but—hate.

HELEN. [*In a low, strangled voice.*] But I didn't know [*with a sob*—Hedria.

HEDRIA. [*Savagely.*] And you didn't want to know. None of youse wanted to know. [*Breaking out in a passion.*] It weren't nobody's business. Nobody cares. Nobody [*slowly*—except—Sam. [*Looking straight in front of her; in a whisper.*] Sam's been good to me. He never beat me, and he saved me—

when—when he could. [*Looking at him, smiling a little, her voice weakening.*] I guess—I guess—I’ll —— [*Collapsing.*] Whiskey —— [*As Sam holds the cup up to her; pushing it away, coughing and choking.*] I—c-an’t swallow —— [*Gasping.*] You—you’d better hurry—up.

[*Helen rises, shaking with suppressed sobs, and crossing over to table, stands with her back to them, trying to control herself.*]

SAM. [*To Garvin.*] We’ll cut the first part out. I’ll swear to that, and we’ll come to last night.

[*Helen, looking up, half-turns, listening intently.*]

You see, she cleared out when she heard about his marrying another woman. So last night he sent for her. Said he “wanted to fix it up nice and comfy.” Hey! Hedria?

HEDRIA. [*Her eyes closed; gasping.*] Y-es.

SAM. And when he got her here, he locks the door ——

HELEN. [*Turning, her voice quivering.*] That's not true.

SAM. [*Savagely.*] Not ——

HELEN. [*Defiantly; coming down, meeting his look, her face deadly white.*] No.

SAM. [*Mimicking her.*] No? [*Jeeringly.*] How yer goin' to prove it?

HELEN. I was here.

[*Garvin starts, the pen drops to the floor and he sits, staring at her.*

[*Looking away, her face quivering.*] I—I came to tell him—something.

SAM. [*Savagely.*] You did, did yer?

HELEN. [*Defiantly.*] Yes. And the door was open then.

SAM. [*Sneeringly.*] Oh, yes, then. But after you left, hey? [*Looking at her, gloatingly.*] After you left?

HELEN. [*Looking at him, her face whitening; moistening her lips.*] After I——

SAM. Yes. [*Chuckling.*] He! he! After you left——

HELEN. [*Raising her head, looking at him; slowly.*] What if I didn't leave?

SAM. You—didn't——

GARVIN. [*Rising.*] Miss Clo—— [*Breaking off.*] You do not [*stammering*]—you—cannot—— [*Breaks off.*]

THE DEAN. [*Speaking at the same time.*] Helen! [*Coming down; pleadingly.*] My child!

HELEN. [*Putting her hand in his, appealingly; turning, and facing Garvin, her voice trembling.*] My father objected to—to our marriage. [*Raising her head, moistening her lips.*] He—he—will not object—now. [*The Dean's hand closes over hers; looking at him, for a moment, with moist eyes.*] The Dean—

the Dean came here—came —— [*Breaking off.*] As my father's friend—as an old friend of the family—he will marry us this morning.

SAM. Yer lying. [*Shaking Hedria, roughly.*] She's lying, Hedria. [*As she does not answer.*] Do yer hear, she's lying.

HEDRIA. [*Without opening her eyes, half-conscious.*] I'll say—any-thing—y-ou—want—Sam—any-thing —— [*Her words trail away.*]

SAM. [*Looking up, facing Helen, his face purpling.*] Look a-here ——

[*Pointing to Garvin.*] Do you expect him to believe—that—against this here girl's statement—her sworn statement?

HELEN. [*Looking at him.*] It will be her sworn statement against my sworn statement.

[*The door opens and Peter comes in. Seeing them, he starts, then stands, watching; door partly closed.*]

SAM. [*Furiously.*] There ain't a word of truth in it.

HELEN. If hers is true, then mine is true.
[*Coming down closer; in a cold, quiet voice.*]
Which do you think a jury would believe?

[*Peter, his whole face lighting, closes the door noiselessly, hesitates, still doubting.*]

SAM. [*Looking at her, his lips curling back.*]
You —— [*As the Dean comes forward a step, breaking off.*] For a pie-faced white girl, you're slick. But yer ain't quite slick enough.

[*Peter comes down a few steps, his eyes on Sam Weber.*]

Yer can lie yer "steady" out of jail—maybe—but yer can't lie out yer father.

HELEN. [*Looking up, quickly.*] Father?
[*Garvin, suddenly seeing Peter, tries to warn Sam.*]

SAM. Yes. [*Noticing nothing; through his teeth.*] Yer father.

[*Peter, crossing, catches him by the collar.*

[*Choking and struggling.*] Let—go—go—me. Let—g—— [*Breaks off, sputtering and choking, as Peter shakes him like a rat.*

HELEN. [*White to the lips.*] PETER—— [*Sam's face grows a mottled red; in a whisper.*] You're killing him, Peter.

PETER. [*His fingers closing on Sam's neck, firmly.*] No, I'm not killing him—I'm only doing a little [*flinging him from him*—of what he did to Rosie March. [*Sam catches himself against the table.*

SAM. [*His face ashy.*] Rosie—March—— [*Coming a step nearer, his hands like talons, his face twitching; hoarsely.*] What yer know about—Rosie March—— [*Looking at him, his eyes like a trapped rat, his lips curling away from his teeth.*] What—yer—know——

HEDRIA. [*Catching a familiar name; in a whisper.*] Rosie—Rosie March—— [*Shivering.*] Sh-she's dead.

SAM. [*Wheeling on her; with a snarl.*] Will yer ——

[*Hedria shrinks as if expecting a blow.*

[*Turning.*] It's a lie. Whatever she says—it's a lie.

PETER. [*Looking at him; in the same low, firm voice.*] You'll have to prove that to twelve men [*with a quick, scathing look towards Garvin*]*—that aren't picked.* [*Garvin starts. Smiling at Sam; contemptuously.*] You're clever—a little bit too clever. When you sent a dying woman to die on my doorstep, you forgot that the dying talk. [*Dropping his voice, speaking slowly.*] And I sat—alone with her—all night——

SAM. [*Coming quite close to him; sneeringly.*] And you think her talk ——

PETER. [*Quietly.*] No—this. [*Drawing out a piece of folded brown paper, as Sam starts, holding it out toward him, but just out of his*

reach; with a smile that is not pleasant.] Can you read—it?

SAM. [*After one look, shrinking away; hoarsely.*] Where 'er get it? [*Putting his quivering fingers over his mouth.*] Damn you.

PETER. Out of your desk, in your house, with the aid of a search warrant, and "Law and Order detective [*looking at him, smiling*]"—after Sallie brought "Old Izzy's" message. [*With a short laugh.*] Poor old "Izzy"—had to get another doctor, didn't he?

SAM. [*Making a spring, trying to snatch the paper. Peter catches his arm, none too gently.*] It's a lie. I—I kept it [*trying to twist away*]—to—to scare the girls. [*Whining.*] It's a lie.

PETER. Yes—— [*Letting go of him, quietly.*] It's a lie [*emphasizing it*]"—if your papers are lies. If you bring them to me tomorrow, I'll give you yours.

SAM. [*Moistening his lips.*] Yer will?
[*Forcing a smile.*] Say, that's square Doc;
that's square. We'll let bygones be bygones.

PETER. Yes—bygones will be bygones.
We'll begin new to-morrow. You bring me the
papers up here, and I'll kick you downstairs.

SAM. [*With forced leer.*] Now, yer talking.

PETER. Yes, now; but to-morrow I'll be do-
ing. You have your choice, Mr. Weber, either
a kicking or a hanging; and we'll see that your
friend, THE ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY,
HELPS DO IT. [*Crosses toward door.*

SAM. [*Following him, his face whitening.*]
Say—say—now.

HEDRIA. [*Opening her eyes; in a whisper.*]
Sam—Sam ——

SAM. [*Wheeling around, white with fury.*]
Sam! [*Crossing toward her.*] I'll Sam you.
[*Raises his clinched hand.*

[*The Dean starts forward just as Helen*

slips between. In two strides Peter crosses, his hand closing on Sam's throat. Sam falls to his knees, strangling.

HELEN. [*Catching Peter's arm, with a frightened sob.*] What if you killed him— Peter ———

PETER. Kill him? [*Jerking him to his feet; through his teeth.*] Now go.

SAM. [*After one look, starts to the door, darts out, almost closing it. Then thrusting his head in; with a snarl, jerking his head.*] Come on, yer ——— [*Disappears.*

GARVIN. [*Trying to save his "face," but only making a pitiable mess of it.*] Why—why—certainly. [*Crosses hurriedly, goes out closing the door quickly behind him.*

[*Helen, coming to Peter, her eyes swimming, holds out her hands with a little eloquent gesture, asking forgiveness. He takes them, raises them to his lips.*

Then, as Hedria begins to speak, she draws them away slowly, asking him mutely to do what he can. Peter, clasping her fingers in his, turns away and crosses to sofa. Helen stands, her back to the audience, fighting for control.

HEDRIA. [*Who has struggled in a half-sitting position, staring at Peter; in a questioning, choking, whisper.*] He's [*groping around, touching the Dean's sleeve, speaking in a low, rasping voice, panting for breath*]*—he's—gone—ain't h-e?*

THE DEAN. [*Pityingly.*] Yes, Hedria.

HEDRIA. [*Hoarsely.*] It's so da-rk. W-hy do-n't the-y open the shut-ters?

THE DEAN. [*Brokenly.*] Why, child, the sun is shining on your face.

HEDRIA. [*Incredulously.*] T-he—sun ——

THE DEAN. [*Brokenly.*] Yes, God's sun.

HEDRIA. [*Feeling his sleeve, her face lighting.*] There's a God, ain't there?

THE DEAN. [*Dropping down on his knees beside her; Helen turning, comes down and stands at the foot of sofa.*] A God of mercy, of love, of pity.

HEDRIA. [*Looking over him, into space; slowly.*] Don't—don't lie to me. There's a God, but [*drawing herself up a little*]*—he ain't your God. He's the only God I knowed—the God—that made—Hell. [Gripping his arm, looking at him with glittering, unseeing eyes.]* There's—a—Hell, ain't—there?

THE DEAN. [*Taking her hand between his; tenderly, pleadingly.*] Hedria, try to think——

HEDRIA. [*Looking up and over him, struggling to raise herself.*

[*Peter, who has been watching her at tentively, bends over, slipping the pillows back of her, supporting her.*

There's a Hell, and that's—where—I'm goin'—— [*Drawing herself upright, her eyes*
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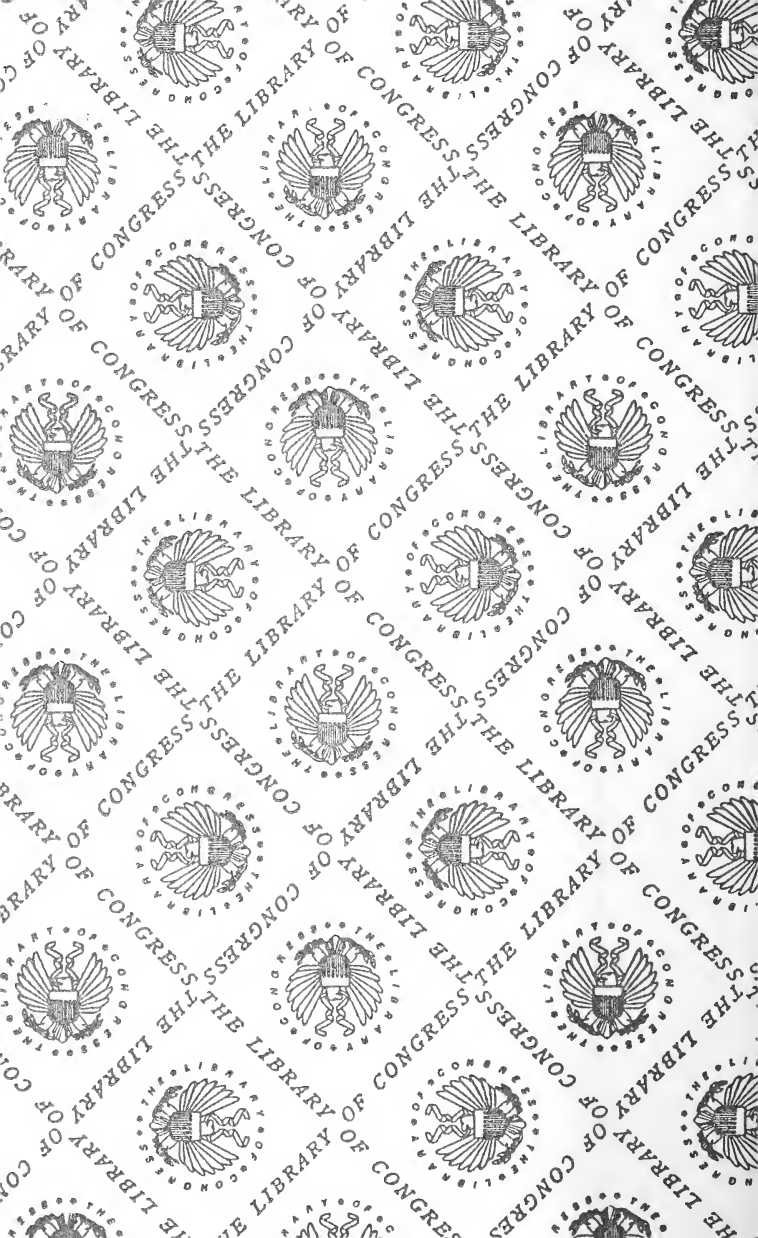
glittering, her voice vibrating with hate, almost with exaltation.] I'm goin'—to wait—to wait—for —— [Slowly, the words slip away from her, her eyes glazing.] To w-ait —— [Collapses suddenly into Peter's arms.

THE DEAN. [*Rising, as Peter gently lays her back against the pillows and nods slowly, raising his hands, his voice trembling.*] “Into Thy hands, O Lord” ——

[*Helen slips onto her knees, sobbing.*

CURTAIN.





WEST BOOKBINDING

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1989

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